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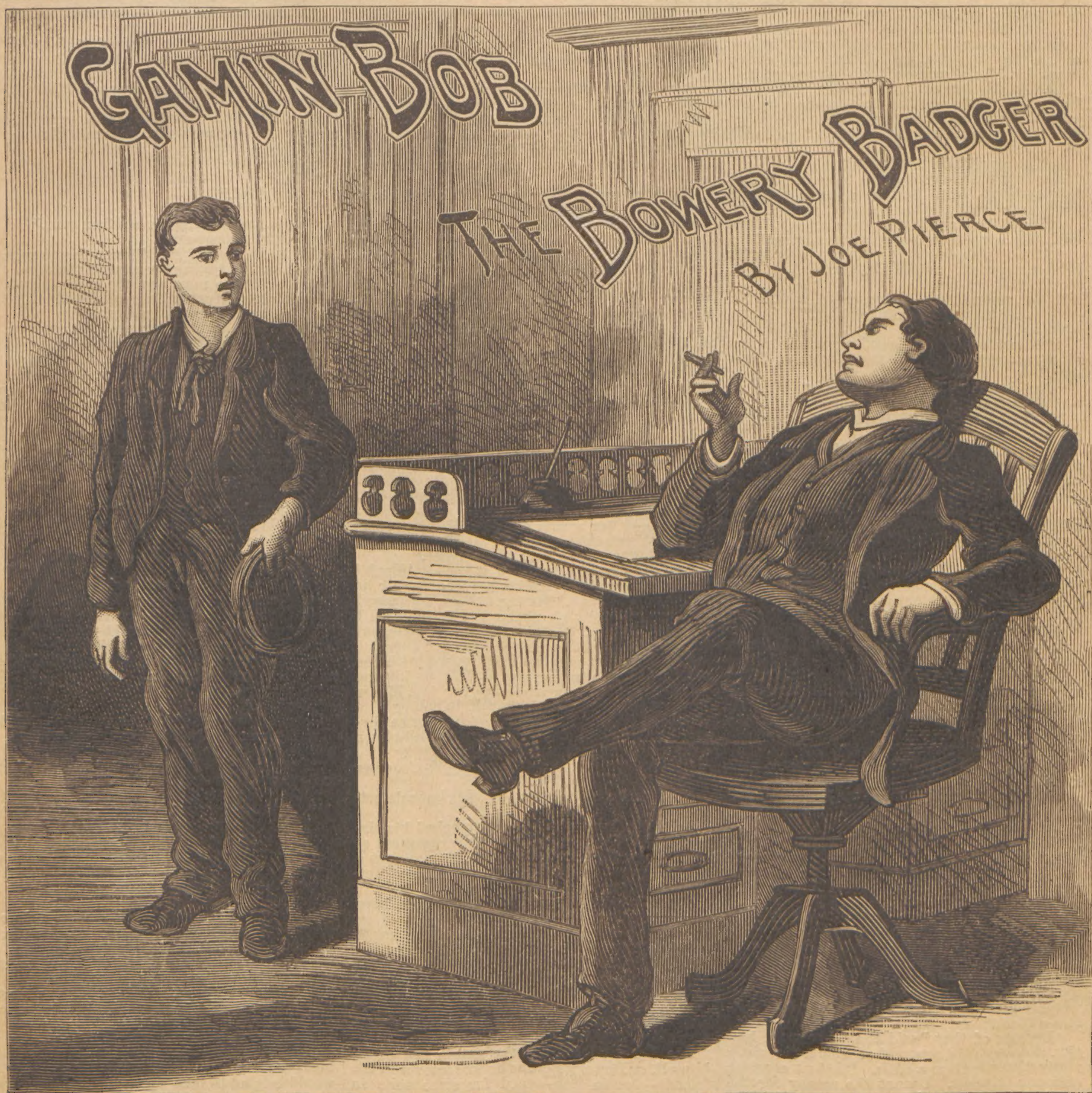
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"MY B'LOVED FRIEN', I'M ALLAYS ONTER TRAILS. I HEV A CONSTOOTIONAL INFIRMARY FER SECH THINGS, AN' I CAN'T KEEP OUT ON'T NO MORE'N YOU KIN CHAW WAX."

Gamin Bob, THE BOWERY BADGER;

OR,

Scooping a Slippery Set.

BY JO PIERCE,
[OF THE NEW YORK DETECTIVE FORCE.]

CHAPTER I.

THE BOY UNDER THE BOX.

"HELLO! w'ot's that I hear? A plan fur ter make money which 'spectable folkses mustn't hear? An' dynamite mentioned inter ther same breath? Gosh all Jew's-harps! I'll bet my goold watch—when I git one—thet I've fell kerslap onder a gallus conspiracy!"

The speaker was a boy, and the boy was in a strange place.

On one of the piers of New York, next to the East river, a box, which looked like an abandoned dry-goods case, was turned upside down. It had not been there a great while, for articles which can be used for firewood don't lie around unnoticed in a city where there are so many poor people; but there it was.

Under the box was a boy.

He had sauntered along a little while before, and, seeing it, had turned it over and curled himself up for a "snooze," as he expressed it.

Had he not turned it over, other boys might have disturbed his rest by making him a target, but, as it was, he "had the dead-wood on 'em an' ther box onder himself," as he thought, with a quiet smile.

But he was not destined to fall asleep.

Not many minutes had he been in his new lodging-house when two men came down on the pier and took position on top of the box.

"This will be as good a place as any," said one, "for nobody can approach us unseen."

"An' in this a'fair we don't want nobody ter hear our oration," replied the other.

"You bet we don't."

"Wal, we're safe, so heave ahead, boss."

"It's settled that the thing is a go."

"Good fur you."

"The goods will be shipped according to previous arrangements, leaving Boston on Tuesday."

"An' gittin' ter New York—when?"

"When Gabriel blows his trumpet."

Both men laughed, and then the second speaker added:

"I never heard that old Gabe had a contract ter raise sunken merchandise, but he could do a right smart biz ef he went inter it, an' fishin' in Long Island Sound orter be good."

"Just so. Well, Hank, how about the dynamite?"

"Didn't I tell ye I could work ther racket?"

"Yes."

"Wal, ole boss, I allays does ez I say, an' kin put up enough dynamite ter blow all ther Sound steamers ter glory a-hossback."

It was at this point that the boy under the box made the mental observations with which this chapter began, and he proceeded to listen with new interest.

It was clear enough that some nefarious scheme was afloat, and he was of a nature to be interested in all such things.

"What will you have to pay for the dynamite and the machine?"

"A cool five hundred dollars."

"Whew! We can't afford to pay any such sum."

"Don't ye expect ter make ten times that?"

"Certainly not. Two thousand is all we can get out of it, at the most."

"Ship more vallerble goods."

"It can't be done. To go in too strong would be to give ourselves dead away. No; we can't pay any such sum, and we won't. That is flat."

Hank chuckled.

"Jest w'ot I told ther dynamite chaps, an' I beat 'em down from their fu'st figures ter three hundred. That's jest ther boodle it'll take ter git ther machine, an' you kin hev enough ter t'ar ther steamer all ter bits. But don't it seem too mighty bad ter hev all ther money an' goold watches ther passengers kerry go ter ther bottom wi' 'em?"

"Enough of that," said the other man, hastily, as though the prospect of such a slaughter really disturbed him a little. "Let us consider only our business. I want the money for the goods I shall pretend to ship, but don't ship, and you want what I promised you."

"Jes'so."

"Then the dynamite is sure?"

"Sure ez sure kin be."

"Very well; I'll send my partner around to see you soon, and he'll make arrangements. By the way, who is the captain of the boat which leaves Tuesday night?"

"Berkrode."

"Good! He's an old tyrant who won't be missed by any one. I'd rather blow him up than a better man. Well, Hank, I'm off, for I have an engagement. Be careful, will you?"

"Bet yer ducats!"

"Good-day."

"So-long, boss."

There was a sound of retreating footsteps, but one man remained on the box. He seemed busy, and in a short time the odor of tobacco showed that he had lighted his pipe.

Then he, too, moved away.

His steps had barely ceased to sound when one side of the box was raised. A sharp, shrewd face appeared at the opening, and the boy listener looked after the man.

He had planned to see the last of the plotters and "spot" him, but a large covered wagon had driven to the edge of the pier and concealed him.

The boy quickly scrambled out of his hiding-place.

"Mustn't lose sight o' that measly varmint, fur I've got arter a gallus scheme, an' ef I don't bend my walkin'-beams, a sart'in steamer will be blowed inter chaos an' kindling-wood, b'gosh! Whar is he?"

Sure enough, where was Hank?

The street had suddenly become filled with one of those crowds which gather like magic in our great city, and of thirty-odd men, at least half were of the class to which the boy believed Hank belonged—rough, uneducated laboring-men.

Nobody was walking away. Hank had joined the crowd. Which one was he?

The boy looked, but for the life of him he could not decide. One of the oft-repeated street scenes of New York held the crowd, and there was nothing to tell which was his man.

He felt keenly disappointed, though it was not in any degree his fault. Luck had worked curiously against him, and under like circumstances the most skillful of detectives would have been similarly foiled.

Still, the young gamin was persevering, and he hung around, listening to every voice he could catch, until the crowd broke up. When they went his course was no clearer, and he was forced to pause and accept his defeat.

He would have given much to follow Hank and learn who he was, but it was not so to be.

"It's too ripplin' bad fur any use," he muttered, disconsolately. "Hyar is a gallus scheme afoot, lookin' fur ter swindle somebody big, blow a steamer ter ther blue ether an' back, an', incidentally, ter smash a boat-load o' innercent hooman-bein's inter chaos an' kindlin'-wood, an' I don't know who's inter ther scheme."

"One o' ther measly chaps is named 'Hank,' but w'ot ther rest o' his handle is, an' whar he hangs out, I dunno. Ez fur t'other, he 'peared ter be a gent o' high pedigree, but that's all I know about him. 'Tain't much o' a clew, but ther game mustn't be played—not fur Joseph!"

The boy shut one eye and looked with the other as though taking aim at the conspirators.

"I reckon hyar is a chance fur you, Mister Bowery Badger to hustle yerself in holing a lot o' snakes. It won't be ther fu'st lot you've coraled, an' at this rate you'll soon be a full-blown detector o' gallus conspirations."

"Ther firm o' B. Bowery, Vidocq & Co. orter take out a diploma, b'gosh!"

The speaker looked like anything but a detective.

In point of years he had just reached his sixteenth birthday, though he hardly appeared so old. He was rather small for his age, but a careful survey would show that he was compactly built and unusually muscular.

His face was narrow, and its expression keen and shrewd, with a merry twinkle in his eyes. It was an honest, prepossessing face, too, though not so clean as one could wish. His garments were ill-fitting and ragged, and all things went to show that he was of the poorer class, and a genuine "street Arab," which means a good deal in New York.

If there is any class that get their wits sharpened, it is these same street Arabs.

The Bowery Badger as the gamin had called himself, or Bowery Bob, as he was known by his friends—Gamin Bob—stood for some time in deep thought.

He had accidentally learned a secret which he knew ought to be made known to the authori-

ties at once, and he was considering how to do it. His own experience with the police had not been pleasant. His rags and his precarious face usually led policemen to regard him with suspicion, and, if he went to one now, he would probably be accused of trying to "put up a job" on them. "Which same bein' ther case, I'll locomote over ter Wrixley's office. Wrix 'll give me p'int, an' mebbe he an' me 'll work up ther case in cahoots."

Wrixley was a celebrated detective, who had befriended Bob before then, and who appreciated him at his true value. It had been the fortune of the boy, in his life about the streets, to help unearth several villainous schemes, and he had now and then helped the detective.

He now made his way to that gentleman's office.

He did not find his friend in, but he did find another detective, whose name was Stonerod, and whom he had met there before, when the two officers were associated on a case.

Stonerod was smoking and taking life easy, but he removed his cigar as the boy entered.

"Hallo, young fellow! So it's you again?"

"Ef 'pearances ain't delusive, it's w'ot's left on me. I'm redooced ter a mere shadder, ez ye perceive, but w'ot's left is twenty-seven ounces ter ther pound avo'dupus."

"How's the peanut trade, and the stand on the Bowery?"

"Peanuts ain't w'ot they should be. Ther spat 'tween England an' Rooshy, an' ther cholera in Spain, hez hed a demoralizin' an' moralizin' effect on ther market, an' my pard, Stumpy, hez ter set around an' whistle 'Climbin' up the Golden Bannister' most o' ther time. But this ain't w'ot brung me hyar. Where's Wrix?"

"Gone to Boston."

"Boston, hey?"

"Yes."

"That's bad."

"How so?"

"Kase I wanted fer ter see ther gent."

"Won't I do as well?"

The Badger eyed Mr. Stonerod seriously, as though he was taking his mental measure. He did not like the man any too well, though he knew Wrixley trusted him, and he did not feel at all inclined to confide in him.

"Wal, ef I wanted ter 'rest ther mayor, or any o' ther city fathers, you might do, for Wrix says you're a right smart chap; but this hyar is private biz 'tween me an' Wrix, d'ye see?"

"Are you on the trail of more crookedness?"

The detective showed renewed interest, but the more he moved that way, the more sharp-witted Bob felt inclined to edge away.

"My b'loved frien', I'm allays onder trails. I hev a cons'tootional infirmity fur sech things, an' I can't keep out on't no more'n you kin chaw wax."

"If you have a case in hand, take me in place of Wrixley. I'll divide honors."

"Divide yer uncle!" thought Bob. "You're too red-hot ter suit me, Mr. Stonewall, you be."

Then he replied:

"Don't ye jump at misty chances, pard. Ef ye was a fish, ye'd git outside ther fu'st fish-hook that was tossed inter ther briny deep. Who's got a case? I ain't said nothin' 'bout no case. Say, when d'ye expect Wrix?"

"He may come to-night," curtly replied Stonerod, who seemed offended.

"An' may not?"

"Just so."

Gamin Bob meditated for a moment. If Mr. Wrixley returned within twenty-four hours, he would have ample time to consult him.

"Reckon I'll indite an' eppisal an' leave hyar, so he can git it when he 'rives."

"Can you write?"

"My b'loved frien', w'ot d'ye take me fur? Do I look like ez though I was brung up in ignorance, squalor an' infermy? S'pose I can't sling ink? Why, ef I had a ribbon with ink onder it, I'd be fit fur one o' them new-fangled pianners they call type-writers. Don't 'sturb me now."

The boy had seated himself and was already wielding a pen. Had Stonerod been near, he would have seen that the boy wrote a very fair hand, but he took his time for it and twisted his mouth in various ways as he wrote.

Mr. Stonerod watched him with curiosity which was not so friendly as it might have been.

He knew the boy of old.

Wrixley had always represented him as a peculiarly shrewd young street scout, who had a tact for running upon things which a detective would be glad to take up. Now, Stonerod was almost sure that the lad had stumbled upon something crooked, and he was chagrined that he would not confide in him.

Gamin Bob finished the note, put it in an envelope and sealed it, after which he placed it on the desk in a conspicuous position.

"Where now?" asked Stonerod, as he saw the gamin preparing to leave.

"Got an engagement wi' ther mayor, fer ter see about buildin' the Grant monement. Him an' me take a lunch at Delmonico's, an' then go ter ther opera. Do you stay hyar?"

"Yes."

"Wal, keep up ther reptation o' Wrix's sanctootum. Hope ther crooks won't git ther bulge on honest folkses while you're off duty an' lollin' here fer some one to give yer a lift."

He strolled out as he finished this suggestive remark, leaving Mr. Stonerod looking after him sourly.

"Confound his impudent tongue, what business of his is it whether I'm on duty or off? I'd like to twist his neck; he was mightily afraid to tell me what was on the hooks. I'll bet he has found a chance for detective work. I'd give a dollar to know what's in that letter!"

CHAPTER II.

THE UNROMANTIC REALITY OF A POOR YOUNG MAN.

THE Bowery Badger left the detective's office and walked thoughtfully northward. His mind naturally still ran on the subject which had taken him to Wrixley's, and he felt far from satisfied.

"This 'ere delay ain't wot I hanker fur. There's a gallus scheme afoot, an' it orter be set down on like a fat woman on a basket o' aigs, an' now Wrix ain't around. It's true that he kin pervent ther steamboat bein' blown ter Jupiter jest by hoppin' on ther craft when she leaves t'other end o' ther rowt; an' that don't need much time previous; but I reckon he'd like ter be runnin' with his nose right on the trail all ther time. But he ain't here. Wot shall be did?"

He considered the matter fully, and once decided to go straight to Police Head-quarters and tell all he had heard. But he did not.

"No; all ther satisfaction I'd git would be ter have 'em laugh a derisive laugh, as 'twere, an' sling my bodily element out o' ther door by one heel. Somehow I don't strike p'lice favorable nohow. Must be thar is summut in my classic feetur's not wot it should be."

He passed his hand slowly over his face, as though searching for the something which told against him.

"S'pose I might 'a' confided in Jason Stonerod, but something about that squint-eyed gent don't impress me favor'ble. Strange that Wrixley trains wi' him. I wouldn't, b'gosh, an' I don't believe ther mayor or postmaster would."

By this time the street scout was on the Bowery, and he soon reached a peanut-stand which was perched near the curbstone.

This was his "place of business," which he worked in company with another boy known as Stumpy. Bob had been somewhat lucky in two or three detective jobs, and had accumulated enough money so that he need not have gone in rags, nor have run the stand either, for that matter; but he had a passion for detective business, and thought old clothes best suited to his purpose.

It was his money that had started the stand, while Stumpy gave only his labor, but as the Badger was there but little, the small profit was equally divided.

The partners were not in the least alike.

Gamin Bob was rugged, strong and compact; Stumpy was small and weak. Bob was able to cope with any boy of his age; Stumpy was lame, and fit neither for fighting nor running.

Moreover, Stumpy was of a very meek nature, though Bob, with a lively, humorous fancy, always insisted that he was a great fighter and very aggressive.

Up to this stand he now sauntered, with his hands in his pockets, nodding nonchalantly to Stumpy's bright, welcoming smile.

"Wal, pard, how is merchandise and finance?"

"I've sold two quarts since noon," replied Stumpy, in a small but cheerful voice.

"You hev? Two quarts? Two whole quarts? B'gosh, Stumpy, biz is jest settin' up on its hind legs an' howlin'. You are sure it were two whole quarts?"

"Oh! yes, Bob. I hope you didn't think I gave short measure."

"You kin gamble rocks, I didn't, an' I kin walk all over ther slouch who says you did. Ef thar is any one thing ther house o' B. Bowery, Stumpy & Co. values, it's its perfesh'nal honor. Jes' so! Perfesh'nal honor, Stumpy, is ther eks on which ther wheel o' success turns. Allays

give full measure, Stumpy, an' mebbe you'll git ter be a mayor or alderman."

"Nonsense, Bob!"

"Jes' so; considerable nonsense is also needed. Takes a big stock-in-trade ter make a alderman."

Stumpy shook his head soberly. He had a profound veneration for the dignitaries of great Gotham, and the light way in which Gamin Bob always referred to them, shocked him.

Before more could be said the shrewd Gamin observed a familiar face. It was that of a young man of something like twenty-one years; one who had more than the average of manly symmetry of face and form; but at that time he looked somewhat haggard and worn out.

He was passing without a word, but Bob called to him.

"Hello, you! Hev ye got a beam inter yer eye so that ye can't see, or hev ye shook yer ole frien's?"

The young man paused and looked at the boy in a wavering, undecided manner.

"Oh! is it you, Bob?"

"Is it me? Wal, I should mentally concur that it is. Who did you 'spect 'twas? Who usually keeps this 'ere palatial emporium o' trade an' traffic? Didn't see no item in ther daily paper ter ther 'fect that I'd sol' out, did ye? 'Spect I'd move inter Macy's, wi' all my stock in trade? See yer, Dave, wot's ther matter with you?"

The boy's keen eyes had not been idle.

"Nothing is the matter."

"Oh, come off! 'Spect I've got near-sighted, blind, halt or lame? Ye look like ez though you'd been on a spree."

"I haven't," Dave gruffly replied.

"No? 'Pearances is mighty onreliable then. You look like a scorched rat, b'gosh! Been sick?"

"No. You ought to be a lawyer, you're so good at cross-questioning. Remember I'm not on the witness-stand, and say no more. I'm in haste now and must go, but I'll see you again."

"Ain't you working to-day?"

"Who said I wasn't? Don't let your tongue run away with you."

With this caution, given with increased tartness, the speaker moved off. Gamin Bob stared after him, and whistled softly.

"Hello, Stumpy, wot's ther racket wi' Mr. Dave Ballard? Never seen him in sech a snappish mood afore. He seemed hankerin' ter chaw my ears off, an' never deigned ter say 'Boo!' ter you."

"Perhaps he's in trouble—I fear he is," mildly replied the lame boy.

"Wal, that ain't no reason why he should let his measly passions rise, an' be uglier than a sore-headed bear," was Bob's practical reply.

"Still, I reckon you are about co-rect on that p'int, Stumpy, an' I must say I'm sorry. Dave is a good chap, an' I wish him well. Mebbe I could help him ef he spoke out, but 'tain't no way furter git help ter go a-growlin', an' a-howlin', an' a-mowlin' around like he does—not fur Joseph!"

In the mean while the object of these remarks was striding up the Bowery as though anxious to escape himself.

"I'll get into my room and stay there," he thought, bitterly. "I carry an advertisement of my disgrace on my face, so that it is noticed even by street Arabs. Bob accused me of having been on a spree. Ha! ha! If he knew the kind of a spree, even he would shrink away from me. Ha! ha!"

His laugh was not a musical one, and his face was not happy or amused.

On the contrary, he looked and acted miserable and desperate.

He continued on his way until he reached Twelfth street. Turning there, he went to a dingy brick house, applied a key to the door, entered and made his way to an attic room.

This was his dwelling-place, such as it was, but it was by no means a luxurious place. The furniture was scant, old and mixed, and certain spots on the ceiling and walls showed that when rain fell, the roof did not wholly suffice to keep it out.

David cast his hat aside viciously, and then proceeded to fill a pipe with tobacco. This done, he lit it and sat down to smoke. He was in trouble, and he always found his tobacco a good friend in such cases.

Several minutes he sat there, smoking and thinking, but even the aid of the tobacco could not enable him to banish the shadow from his face. Then came a rap at the door.

He looked up in surprise, hesitated, and then arose and went to the door. He opened it.

A well-dressed man stood outside, and that he was no stranger was proven by Ballard's

start of surprise. Neither did he seem to be a welcome visitor, for the young man's face clouded still more.

"You here!" he muttered.

"As you see, David," was the smooth reply.

"Are you not going to ask me in?"

Ballard hesitated for a moment.

"The way is open," he said, ungraciously, as he stepped back.

The visitor entered, and, unheeding the unfriendly glances bestowed upon him, calmly removed his hat and gloves, set them on the old table and helped himself to a chair.

During this period David watched him in silent wrath, dimly conscious that Mr. Courtlandt Walkington—such was the visitor's name—was making appropriate remarks about the weather.

Mr. Walkington was a benevolent-looking man—at least, so nearly everybody said. Moreover, he was a fat, smooth-faced man, who seemed to iron the wrinkles of time from his face every day of his life, till it was as smooth and bland as a child's; a big man, with a small voice, which was like the soft, gurgling noise of running oil.

Having disposed of his hat, he looked squarely and benevolently at young Ballard.

"Have you secured a situation yet, David?"

"Have I?" explosively demanded David. "Have I? Who would hire me—a branded thief?"

Mr. Walkington coughed deprecatingly.

"Dear me, David, you need not express it quite so bluntly. I know the peculiar temptations to which young men are subjected, and when one yields, let us not say that he is a thief, but that he was indiscreet."

"But I did not yield!" fiercely cried David.

"Ahem!"

"Enough of that!" vehemently continued the younger man. "You are not now in the office of Walkington & Goff, but in my chamber, and you shall neither charge me with crime, nor put in your tantalizing 'ahem's,' nor anything of the kind. Why you are here I don't know, but let me tell you that I still assert my innocence, and if you dare insult me I'll kick you downstairs!"

It was a threat which few New York millionaires would have heard calmly, but Mr. Courtlandt Walkington caressed his double chin, and seemed proof against anger.

"Do not be hasty, David. I beg that you will hear me before you pronounce condemnation. Why do you suppose I am here?"

A hot answer trembled on the younger man's lips, but he repressed it with an effort.

"Why are you here?" he bluntly asked.

CHAPTER III.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

MR. WALKINGTON looked a little more cheerful as he noticed the change in David's voice.

"I am here for your good, I assure you," he replied, smoothly. "The late unfortunate occurrence has given me a great deal of pain, for I had built hopes on you which I disliked to abandon—"

"One word," interrupted David. "Do you believe me guilty?"

Walkington hesitated.

"How can I reply?"

"Truthfully—if you know how."

The hard inflection was again in the young man's voice, for he read Walkington's manner aright. He took a quick turn across the room, and then planted himself squarely before his visitor.

"Mr. Walkington," he said, "I entered your office three years ago on a small salary. Man never tried harder than I to give satisfaction. I wanted an advance in pay, and I wanted to be successful in life; and I knew enough to realize that an employee's interests are identical with those of his employer."

"Not a word of fault was found with me until—that day when Mr. Goff accused me of being a thief. Words cannot express my surprise and dismay. I had been as faithful as I knew how, and I had been honest to the letter. What was my reward? I was dismissed from your employ—as a thief!"

"David!"

"Can you deny it?"

"You make my present business very difficult."

"Then you have really come on business?"

"Yes."

"State it then, and I'll sit here like a post and hear you to the end."

Ballard spoke firmly, and then threw himself into a chair with a fixed determination to do as he said. He felt a good deal of wonder as

to why oily Mr. Walkington had called on him, and he would rather have the full statement in few words.

"Thank you, David; you now show commendable wisdom. Hear me as a friend, and I think you will not regret it."

David could hardly avoid repeating the word "friend" ironically, but he curbed his inclination.

"Since you left our office," continued the merchant, "you have often been mentioned by Mr. Goff and myself. At first he was bitter against you, but nearly three-score years have calmed my passions, and I realize that life is full of temptations, and that the fallen may become purified."

Ballard set his teeth tightly. He did not like the word "fallen," but bore it silently.

"Day by day I expressed my views," resumed Walkington, "and Mr. Goff finally became less severe. He remembered your term of service; your ability and tact for work; and he finally expressed regret at what had taken place."

"One word, Mr. Walkington. I say now, as I said then, that I know nothing about the sum of money which disappeared from your safe, and that I never wronged you of a cent of money."

David's assertion was earnest, but his employer did not notice it in words.

"I saw that Mr. Goff was yielding, and yesterday I attacked the fortress in earnest. In brief, I suggested that we give you another trial."

David's face brightened for a moment, but the cloud soon returned.

"As a pardoned thief, sir?"

"As a young man of promise."

"Pardon me, but I decline to be pardoned for an offense I never committed. If you re-employ me, it must be as one wrongfully accused and acquitted."

Mr. Walkington caressed his chin anew.

"How can we prove you innocent?"

"Have I ever been proved guilty?"

"Not exactly."

"Not exactly!" What proof was there against me? A sum of money is alleged to have disappeared from the safe, to which you, Mr. Goff and myself alone had the combination. I was accused on that fragile testimony. Was the money ever in the safe? Did not one of you remove and forget it? Might not other hands have taken it, lock or no lock? Was a cent of the money found in my possession? Did I not ask you to search my person and my room—to search everywhere?"

"Such was the drift of my argument," placidly replied Mr. Walkington. "What do you suppose Mr. Goff said?"

"What did he say?"

"That he had been hasty."

Ballard's face brightened.

"Did he admit that?"

"Yes."

"And you—can you believe me innocent?"

The young man's voice was tremulous.

"I can believe so much that I will not willingly destroy your future. In plain words, we want you back!"

David Ballard's face was joyous. He was not of a suspicious nature, and though he had but a few minutes before been cast down to the lowest depths, he now arose to corresponding heights.

"Is it possible?" he cried.

"Possible and true, David."

Mr. Walkington's manner had never been blander.

"Then you—surely, you cannot think very severely of me."

"Assuredly, I do not, David."

"And my intemperate—my unjust words, since you came here?"

"You are young."

"Then you forgive them?"

"I do."

For a second it hovered in Ballard's mind that this generosity was something very different from what he had supposed Courtlandt Walkington's nature to be—he had often mentally termed him an oily hypocrite, even when enjoying his favor of old—but he put back the suspicion.

"And I, sir, humbly apologize."

"Nay, David, it is not necessary. Let us call it quits and begin anew. Your pay will begin to-morrow."

"I will be at the office early, sir."

"You need not come."

"Not come, sir?"

"No; for, for a while, we shall put you on other work. Your pay begins to-morrow, but

you will have nothing to do. We are about shipping some valuable goods from Boston to this city, via a Sound steamer, and, for our own satisfaction and sense of security, we propose to send an employee along on the boat to keep a general watch over the goods. This will be your duty."

David looked perplexed. Walkington & Goff often received goods via the Sound, but never before had he known that a man accompanied them.

As the transportation line was responsible for the property, their care seemed sufficient.

"Are the goods unusually valuable?"

"No, but they are valuable."

"What will be the nature of my duties?"

"That we will tell you later; you will receive full instructions before you start. You may call at the office, at three o'clock to-morrow."

"Very well, sir."

"And now I will go."

Mr. Walkington arose as he spoke.

"One question, sir, if you please. Shall I be retained for this special work?"

"Oh, dear, no," replied Mr. Walkington; "it will be only for a few trips—possibly for but one. This leads me to direct you to say nothing about the matter; not even to your best friend."

"It shall be as you say, Mr. Walkington."

"Who knows that you had left the office?"

"No one. I—I told them I was ill."

"That is good. Continue the little fiction, and add that I have given you a vacation. I may as well add that the trip across the Sound is a bit of a secret, and I rely on your sagacity to preserve strict silence."

"Not a word shall pass my lips."

"Good! The end of the affair may result in your stepping into a higher position with us than ever before."

With this remark, which acted like a spur on Ballard's already excited imagination, the merchant took his departure.

He went at once to Leonard street, and was soon in the office of Walkington & Goff.

Mr. Goff was already there. He was a man wholly unlike his partner in outward appearance. The senior partner had peculiarities; the junior had none. He was simply an average man of business; a shrewd, faithful member of the force of city merchants.

At least, such was his reputation in New York.

He looked up as Walkington entered.

"Well?"

"All well," replied the senior partner, with an oily chuckle. "I have seen David."

"And fixed him, I dare be sworn."

"Yes; he will return to our employ."

"And take a trip across the Sound?"

"As guardian of our valuables."

"By the sky-line?"

"Ha! ha! Just so; by the sky-line. Ha! ha!"

Mr. Walkington laughed. It was not a loud laugh, but a mellow, jolly, refined and benevolent laugh; the laugh of a good man who feels that he has done a good deed.

"You are sure the plan will not miscarry?"

"Quite sure. I left David full of gratitude and rapture, and he promised to remain as silent as the grave."

"A good simile, by Jove."

"Perhaps I should add, as silent as the watery grave."

"In the Sound?"

"Exactly."

"It takes you to fix 'em, Walkington."

"I fancy that I have a persuasive tongue."

"Well, I've seen Hank again."

"What did he say?"

"That all is well. He can get the stuff of the dynamiters, and for a reasonable figure. The scoundrel tried to make us disburse five hundred dollars, but I told him flatly that we would pay no such sum, and he fell to three hundred."

"Excellent. That is a mere cipher compared with what we shall make out of it, and the dynamiters will be satisfied."

"You are to see Hank and arrange the rest."

"Very well; I will do so."

The conversation lasted for some time longer, and then the partners attended to certain matters of business and prepared to go.

They did a considerable business, and were well-rated everywhere, it being supposed that their methods were careful, sure and honest. Really, their profits of late had been little more than their expenses. Both had outside money which might have been brought in to bolster up their business, but it was so invested that they disliked to withdraw it, and they had for years

been running unpleasantly close to the breakers with what was in the firm.

They were not the only house in New York, reputed prosperous, which was but a hollow concern.

When Mr. Goff left the office he took a car, and started homeward.

He lived on Lexington avenue in good style, owning the home in which he lived, and his family cut quite a figure among the other nabobs of their set. True, the "best society" did not receive them, but they were only one notch down, and few heads were held higher than theirs.

On to this home went Christopher Goff, unsuspecting of the unpleasant surprise in store for him.

CHAPTER IV.

A RAGGED CLAIMANT.

MR. CHRISTOPHER GOFF reached home. He was admitted by a polite, deferential colored servant. He met his family and greeted them with dignified politeness. He ate his dinner with well-bred ease. Then he sat down in his private room to read his *Commercial Advertiser* like a solid citizen.

When he read, he was seldom disturbed. Dignified Mrs. Goff, and queenly Miss Goff, and snobbish Master Goff, all paid due respect to their lord and master. While they kept their distance, each was a small sun in his, or her, solar system; if they trod on the toes of Goff, senior, they found themselves reduced to small planets, and Master Goff, though fourteen years of age, still knew what it was to revolve around the sun of which he was a son—and feel his heavy hand.

Hence, Goff, senior, was usually left alone.

He expected to be left alone on this occasion, but he was disappointed.

Not more than half an hour had elapsed when there was a knock at the door.

Mr. Goff said "Come!" and the door opened.

The deferential servant showed his head.

"Please, Mr. Goff, thar is two young pussons here who says as now—"

"Jes' so; jes' so. Let us say it ourselves."

Colored Abraham had been pushed aside, and two persons now stood in the room at whom Christopher stared in speechless surprise.

Was it possible that such creatures were in his room?

For they were a ragged boy and a ragged girl, the one fifteen or sixteen years old, and the other some three years younger; two sharp-looking, precocious young people, but children of the street in the full sense of the word.

Both were ragged, and the boy's face was not clean. Mr. Goff saw this, and, as he abhorred dirt, it appalled him. Dirt in his room! What if it should fall away and rest on his splendid carpet?

He shivered as he looked, but anger was more apparent on his face than anything else, and the small girl looked a little embarrassed and inclined to retreat.

Not so the small boy; he had never been more at his ease.

He waved his hand toward the colored servant.

"Hannibawl, you may withdraw yer bodily presence, ter once. This hyar is ter be a perivate intervoo, an' your place is by ther front door. Keep yer orbs o' vision onter ther mat, ter see that nobody don't purloin it. You kin go, Skipio!"

"Hold on!" cried Christopher Goff, finding his voice at last, and his angriest voice at that.

"Abraham, what in the world does this mean?"

"Deed, sah, I ain't ter blame, sah. Dese hyar young wagrants said ez how dey was come onter an errant o' life an' death, an' de boy would come in, sah; 'deed he would, sah."

"Jes' so, Mr. Rough," added the boy, easily. "Don't blame Isaac, fur he tried ter keep us out, but when I mentioned ther life an' death racket he took ther fever an' ager so that he a'most shook his cowhide brogans off, an' got sorter paralyzed, d'ye see? Don't blame Moses, Mr. Rough."

This address was free and easy and angered the great man still more, but some sudden fancy impelled him to hear what his strange visitors had to say.

Why he did so he could not have told, for it was his way to have such customers thrown out.

"You may leave us, Abraham. Remain within hearing of the bell, however."

"Yas," added the street vagabond, "but not within hearin' o' ther key-hole, Job."

The servant darted an angry look at him who was taking such liberties with his name, but did not venture to reply. He retired in good

order, considering his demoralized state of mind.

"Now then," said Mr. Goff, sharply, "state your business at once, boy."

"I guess, Mr. Rough, that you forgot ter say 'Set down,' didn't ye? But we'll waive ther formal formality. Sarah, plant yerself onter there edge o' that bronze-kivered cheer, but hol' onter ther back on't so't you needn't sink outer sight in its luxurious depths. I've been inter ther p'latial abodys o' ther rich an' princely afore, an' I know whatsech cheers are. You don't, not bein' a business individooal, Sarah. Ez fur me, I'll stand. I find that 'are posish the most easiest fur my rheumatiz."

Christopher Goff stared in amazement at the free-and-easy street Arab who dared take such liberties with his house, and to let his tongue run so freely.

"Boy, who are you?" he almost shouted.

"Hey?" questioned the boy, putting one hand behind his ear.

"Who are you?—what is your name?"

"Oh! Beg your august pardin, but yer see I'm deaf in two o' my ears, an' when ye shout seven octaves above highcockalorum G, I can't hear. It's only w'en ye lower yer voice ter C, nat'ral, that I hear distinctly."

"Have done with this foolish and insolent talk. Who are you?"

"Didn't I tell yer? 'Twas an oversight, I reckon, Mr. Rough. My name is Gamin Bob, otherwise the Bowery Badger, an' I'm one o' yer feller-merchants. Ax arter me at City Hall, or ther Board o' Trade. They'll give ye p'int on me. My line is peanuts, an' ef I had a keerd hyar ye would see it printed, 'B. Bowery, Stumpy & Co.'"

To save his life Mr. Christopher Goff could not have told why he let the ragged boy stand there and ramble on. He did not like poor people; he regarded them as the dust under his feet, and never before had he endured a visit like this; but the boy, or his rags, or something else, fascinated him, and—he endured it.

"And the girl?"

"Is Sarah Bird, by name, ter wit, namely: sometimes called Sadie, fur short."

"What do you want?"

"Money," replied the boy

"Justice," added the girl, quickly

Mr. Goff frowned.

"Explain at once."

"Kerect, fur ducats, Mr. Rough. Ef ther affidavit don't lie, you onc't had a brother, Jeems, ter wit, namely."

A quick shadow crossed Goff's face. He glanced at the girl, and his expression was forbidding.

"What is that to you?" he demanded.

"Not much ter me; not a red, copper-alloyed cent; but a heap ter her. Sarah, Mr. Rough, is Jeems's darter!"

Darker grew the rich man's face.

"What lie is this?" he asked, hoarsely.

"It's t'other lie, an' no lie a tall. You've got a true bill, an' ther jury is o' one mind. Mr. Rough, look at yer niece. Sarah, look at yer jolly old unk."

"Boy," cried Mr. Goff, "give me any more of your impudence and I will have you flung out."

"Don't call Lot; for your own peace o' mind, I advise yer not ter call that brunette Ethiop. Chew yer cud an' listen patiently. Sariah, you hev some fax an' figgers bearin' on this case, I b'lieve?"

"I've got Marm Bird's affidavit," promptly put in the ragged girl, "an' it's as straight as a letter I. I didn't come hyar 'thout ther needful."

"This is incomprehensible," said the merchant, still looking darkly at Sadie.

"Ther funder you git, ther more ther incomhenpresibily will be obsarved," replied the gamin, catching boldly at the long word. "But ter come right down ter hard-pan, ther amount on't is this: Sariah, hyar, has lived all her days with one Marm Bird, ter wit, so-called; who lived in a p'latial ole rookery on Mulberry street. She always knowed she wa'n't Marm's darter, but who she was she never knowed or cared ther flap o' a speckled hen's wing."

"Keep ter ther main p'int, young man," briskly put in the small girl.

"Jes' so; jes' so, Sariah—which reminds me ter say, Mr. Rough, that ef you value this 'complicated young lady's frien'ship, you must call her Sadie, an' shoot ther Sariah. Wal, yer see, Marm Bird has died, an' when she was at ther crisis, she tole Sadie ther whole racket. Now, all ye've got ter do is ter open yer arms an' take her in."

"Are you insane?" harshly demanded Goff.

"Not fur Joseph!"

"Then stop such senseless talk."

"Which?"

"Such senseless talk."

"Oh, that's w'ot ye call it, is it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Now, ther atmospear gits smoky. I don't ketch yer meanin' fur a cent."

"You must be mad to come here with such a story. You are young for a blackmailer; possibly you are too young to know what the law does to blackmailers."

"I'm no knight, an' I don't wear no mail, anyhow, but ter speak serious, I know all 'bout law that's wu'th knowin'. Likewise, it percolates through my noddle that you charge me with bein' a blackmailer."

"That is it, exactly."

"Wal, I ain't no blackmailer—not fur Joseph. I hain't got no partic'lar int'rest in this hyar case, 'ceptin' that I've come hyar ez a solid business man ter see that this young female has fair play. Ez fur blackmail, I don't reckon we had better argue that p'int. 'Tain't ter your interest."

"What do you mean, boy?"

"I mean that ef you don't git down off your high hoss an' talk sense you'll wake up ther sleepin' lion, an' he'll chaw you inter cannibawl's pie."

Mr. Goff shifted his position uneasily. People who knew him well would have been surprised to see how tamely he bore the remarks of the ragged pair.

"This claim is absurd," he remonstrated, rather than asserted.

"You won't think so when Sariah scoops in the cool hundred thousand that was her father's."

"My brother James left no children. This girl is an impostor!"

"Oh! you go away!" retorted Sadie. "You can't come that. Marm Bird give me a hist'ry o' ther hull affair, an' I ain't ter be bluffed."

"Your 'Marm Bird' lied, girl! What did she say? Why, James was never married!"

"That's where you're clean off, uncle. He did git married, but his dad an' yourn, John Adams Goff, was then alive, an' ez my pop married a poor girl—a singer on ther stage she was—he never dared own it, for his father always would hev it that his youngest boy was a wild chap an' no 'count, an' he kep' a tight rein on him."

"Marm Bird," added Bob, "allowed ez how somebody p'isoned ther senior Goff's mind ag'in' Jeems; but o' course ther p'isoner warn't ther oldest son, Christopher. O' course he warn't—not fur Joseph!"

The gamin screwed his mouth to one side and winked wisely.

"If, as you say," spoke Christopher Goff, "you are James's daughter, why did he never produce you?"

"'Cause he was killed on ther railroad two days arter his father's death. He didn't have no time fur ter inform ther world in gineral, but he did tell one person."

"Who was that person?" asked Goff, in a hard voice.

"Marm Bird said 'twas you!"

Mr. Goff's hand worked nervously on the arm of his chair.

"Mrs. Bird spoke falsely. Had such been the fact I should have cared for the daughter and wife."

"The wife was dead," put in Bob.

"There never was a wife. James never told me what you assert, and he was never married. I am sure of this, and Mrs. Bird told a lie from whole cloth."

"Christopher," said Gamin Bob, seriously, "I'm s'prised at you. I hate fur ter see a brother merchant trifle so reckless wi' ther fax o' ther case."

"Perhaps you can prove what you say?"

"We kin."

"How? You say Mrs. Bird is dead."

"Marm Bird is demised, but she left her 'fession fur ther 'lightenment o' ther world. She said ez how you give her piles o' bullion ter keep Sariah and ter keep ther secret."

"You are making me out a criminal, boy."

"Ther fax does p'int that way, Christopher."

"Have you Mrs. Bird's statement in writin'?"

"Yas."

"Show it to me."

"'Tain't hyar, Mr. Rough. I tole Sariah we had better not bring it—not fur Joseph."

"Why not?"

"Wal, I 'lowed that it were saft at hum."

"World it be unsafe here?"

"Wal, we can't most allays sometimes tell, ez Socrates said ter Judas 'Scariat."

Mr. Goff frowned, but did not argue the point.

"Who are the witnesses?"

"O' ther paper?"

"Yes."

"They ain't hyar, neither—none 'ceptin' Sadie."

"I must see and talk with them."

The Bowery gamin scratched his head undecidedly, and his manner did not escape Mr. Goff's sharp eyes.

"There were no witnesses, and there is no paper!" he boldly declared.

"Ain't there? Oh, come, Christopher, you can't manipulate this court fur a cent. You set yerself up fur a sharp 'un, but ther sharpest chap I ever knowed was cheated out o' his eye-teeth by a fool. Go slow, Mr. Rough; go slow. Don't bet too high on ther non-existence o' that air dockymment, an' don't forgit that thar stands one o' ther Simon Peter, ginevine Rough family, Jeems's darter, ter wit, namely."

The rich man caressed his mustache for a moment in silence, and then replied:

"I still assert that brother James died childless and unmarried; but I am a just man and shall not let this claim pass unnoticed. I will see those who knew Mrs. Bird, and who know this girl. Should I find a grain of testimony in her favor, I shall give it its due."

"On the other hand, young as you both are, I shall consign you to prison if I find you have trumped up this specious tale."

"You'll find plenty o' trumps back on't, boss; you kin gamble yer last ducat on that. When Robert o' the Bowery goes inter a game, you kin depend on't ther case is fat wi' jestic an' 'spectability. You don't ketch this hummin'-bird in no funny biz—not fur Joseph."

"We will see. Give me your address and that of the late Mrs. Bird."

"Hern you kin hev an' welcome; mine, I prefer to keep a state secret, ef you please."

"A state secret? Why so?"

"So that you can't do any funny biz, Christopher."

CHAPTER V.

THE PRECIOUS PAPER.

MR. GOFF's face showed that he was both angry and chagrined, but he had marked out a course to pursue and could not afford to notice any unpleasant speech.

"You are singularly suspicious, young man, considering that I intend to do full justice in the case, but, as you don't know me, we will let it pass. Give me such facts as you will, and I'll investigate."

"Ain't you got ther fax?" asked Bob o' the Bowery.

"I have your statement, which I shall now investigate."

"Give him all ther items," put in Sadie, with a quick nod. "It sha'n't be said he bought a pig in a poke."

Bob yielded, and Mr. Goff was put in possession of such facts as the boy saw fit to give; but he did not tell where Mrs. Bird's written confession was. His precaution, if such it was, was only ordinary wisdom, but the merchant suspected that no such document existed.

After attending to details, the ragged pair left the house. Gamin Bob gave Abraham a parting remark, calling him Matthew, much to that worthy's anger, and then they disappeared down the avenue.

Both were silent for a while. Bob spoke first.

"Wal, w'ot's yer first impression, Sadie?"

"No good!" was the terse reply.

"How so?"

"That man is a crook by natur', an' he won't do nobody jestic ef he kin help it."

"Wal, now, I'll be waxed fur old soles ef I don't coincidently coincide wi' you. Christopher don't strike me a tall favor'ble," Bob confessed.

"I reckon we might ez wal kept away from him."

"Sho! Your courage ain't slippin' up, is it?"

"That's about ther size on't. W'ot good is thar o' we-'uns tryin' fur ter git ther best o' a millionaire?"

"Sariah, my child, you are young, an' tharfore fail ter perceive that in my o'ficial capacity ez a detective, I jest hev ther dead-wood on Christopher."

"Oh, go 'long! I know you hev grit enough, but w'ot kin you do wi' him?"

"I kin make him squirm, young woman; I kin make him squirm most amazin'. You kin gamble dollars on that," Bob asserted. "Ther detective firm o' B. Bowery, Vidocq and Co. don't steal no green watermillions—not fur Joseph."

Sadie did not share in this confidence, but as Bob was her only real protector, she did not care to wound his feelings by estimating him too low in words.

Both were of the opinion that Christopher Goff would not accept Sadie as his niece and do her justice without a struggle. They had not at any time expected he would. If, as Mrs. Bird had said, he had hired her to take care of the girl, and keep her existence a secret, so that he might wrongfully keep her share of the Goff property, it was not likely he would quietly accord her justice at this late day.

If the girl had possessed a friend who had Bob's shrewdness, without his confidence in himself, that friend would have advised her to place her case in the hands of a good lawyer, with the understanding that if he won he should be properly paid. With so much at stake, any lawyer would have taken the case if her proofs were sufficient, taking his risk of failure and loss of fee.

But Sadie had no such friend, and Bob, accustomed to fight his own battles, saw but one way now—to look after Sadie's interests himself.

He did not, however, fail to realize that he had undertaken a big job. Christopher Goff was, figuratively speaking, entrenched in a position which seemed almost impregnable, and only the gamin's unbounded self-reliance led him to attack that position.

Now that it was done, he intended to win. Silence fell between the young couple as they went; a silence which was finally broken by Sadie.

"Be you goin' home wi' me?" she asked.

"Wal, I've been a-cogitatin'."

"Been a which?"

"Revolvin' an' idee. Say, you ain't made up yer mind ter let me take Marm Bird's dockyment, hev ye?"

"No, I ain't."

"It'd be safter wi' me."

"I can't see it. Sech a perambulating critter ez you be is liable ter git garroted an' gone through, any time. Then whar would ther corn-fession be?"

"It'd be in my pocket ther day ther coroner sat on them ez tried ter garrote me, an' I'd be ez brisk ez a Brooklyn belle. No garroter never got ther bulge on me yit, an' I don't mean they shall. But ef ye want hang onter ther paper, I don't blame ye—not fur Joseph! It is sorter yer own, Sariah, an' Marm Bird tole ye fur ter cling to it like a copper ter a doorway. But you orter hev a safe place ter put it."

"It's rolled up inside ther winder-curtain."

"Korect. Wal, wot's ter pervent it's bein' unrolled? A burglarious inclined chap would git away wi' it."

"What better place is thar?"

"Jes' wot I've been cogitatin'. Ez I said, I'd feel a heap safer ef I had it in my own pocket, but I don't 'sist. Per contrary, I do say in a small howl that somethin' uncommon orter be did wi' it. Therefore I'll go ter yer platial abode an' look up a place o' safety."

He went.

Sadie's "palatial abode" was anything but palatial, as the majority of people understand the term. It was one of the worst old rookeries on a hard street. Dingy, cracked brick walls looked down on wretched pavements. New York is not noted for smooth sidewalks or pavements, but, there, confusion ran riot.

One could not walk without danger of falling. If he tried to cross the street he found mud and refuse flung from the houses. When he breathed he inhaled unwholesome air.

Dirt, disorder and vice ran riot there—vice, for the people were no better than the street, and crime flourished where should have flourished the broom.

This had been Sadie Bird's home; the scene of her education, such as it was. She had lived in the midst of vice—uncontaminated; in the midst of dirt—clean; and if she lived in the midst of rags, ragged, it was because poverty compelled it.

Poverty is the garroter that throttles, the vampire that sucks the blood, and the wolf which worries down the poor.

Sadie and the Badger entered the house.

The girl still occupied the room in which Mrs. Bird had died. It was a miserable affair, but, since she had become sole occupant, Sadie had applied water so freely to it that it seemed like a new place.

Her landlady was one Mrs. Callahan, and Mrs. Callahan was somewhat concerned about the rent. She doubted the girl's ability to pay, and though she had thus far been paid in advance, never missed a chance to question Sadie as to her intentions and her future.

She need not have worried, for, though Mrs. Bird had carefully concealed the fact, Sadie had for two years wholly supported both by selling papers, and she was certainly not injured by the death of the old woman.

But Sadie did not see fit to humor Mrs. Callahan's curiosity, and great was that person's anxiety as to her youngest lodger.

On this occasion she saw the young pair enter, and she at once became interested.

"It's suspicious that it looks whin she begins bringin' her friends hyar, an' Oi'll jest take a look inter dhe room an' see what's in de wind."

With this idea strong in her mind she cautiously ascended the stairs. The door was closed and Sadie and Gamin Bob were talking in such low tones that she did not at first catch their remarks.

She applied her eye to the key-hole.

It was a place of limited observation, but the scene of the room lay just right for her purpose. She saw Bob standing on a chair at the further side, close by the window, and while she looked Sadie unrolled the curtain.

Her wonder increased, and it was not lessened when Bob took from the fold of the curtain a small white paper.

"Hyar she be," he observed.

"Hyar's what?" thought Mrs. Callahan, with great querulousness of spirit. "Begorra, what the Ould Boy kin they have there which they're so choice ave? It looks loike blank paper, but may be a note ave hand, fur all I know."

"Straight ez a string," added Bob; "an' now ter find a place ter put it. Where shall it be?"

"In ther stove," suggested Sadie.

"Not any, fur Joseph. Kindlin'-wood is too mighty cheap fur ter use this fur sech a purpose."

"But thar won't be no fire fur a month."

"We can't run ther risk. We will put it—Hold on! Be thar any p'int from which a eavesdrooper kin git his awful eye on us?"

"No."

"Strikes me I see a key-hole in ther door. Them is useful when properly used, but rank p'ison when some measly old spy glues his awful eye on ther orifice. We don't want no spy; not fur Joseph; an' I'll hang a cloth over it."

He suited the action to the word, much to the wrath of Mrs. Callahan, but the door was not opened, and she kept her place and strained her ears to overhear all.

"It ain't no slouch o' a job ter hide sech a thing safely," continued Bob, "an' I want ter impress on yer suscep'ble mind that ef this hyar parchment goes ter blue chaos, 'twas ag'in' my advice ye put it hyar."

"I want it whar I kin watch over it," somewhat stubbornly replied Sadie.

"So ye shall, fur sure. It's yer own paper, an' you're yer own boss. You'd better keep yer eye peeled fur thieves, an' robbers, an' assassins, though."

"Where'll you put it?"

"I was jest a-siderin'. Be them figgerheads on ther bed-posts tight?"

"Be they? I dunno. Why?"

"I'll show ye."

As Sadie spoke the boy had stepped forward and raised the ornament which surmounted one of the bed-posts, thus revealing a cavity in the post itself to which it was fitted by means of a pin.

"Jest ther place," he added. "Nobody'll think o' pokin' his nose inter that hole."

Mrs. Callahan could see nothing, but she heard enough to give her a full understanding of all, and she grinned evilly.

"Nobody won't, hey?" she muttered. "Begorra, we'll see aboot dhat. Ef Oi don't hev me hands on dhat mysterious paper widin dhe wake, Oi'm a liar."

Any of Mrs. Callahan's neighbors would freely have admitted that she was a liar, but the fact remained that her discovery was unfortunate and dangerous.

The hiding-place found by Bob impressed Sadie as being a novel and clever one. The cap fitted closely to the post proper, and though she had occupied the room for two years, she had never before known that the cap could be removed.

From this she argued that it was a safe place. The paper was stowed away and the ornament replaced, and then Bob prepared to move.

"Ef you hear from Christopher, jest send 'round ter my office," he said, at parting. "You don't want ter measure wits wi' him; it needs an old rounder like me fer ter deal with sech measly chaps. Don't you try it, or Chris will git ther best o' ye."

"I ain't goin' ter hev no great argyment wi' him. Ef he comes 'round an' sez thar is forty or fifty million dollars ready fur me, I'm his huckle-

berry; but ef he p'int's ter ther other tack, I don't sail in no boat wi' him at ther hellum."

"Good 'nough! I observe wi' pleasure that you know a sick cat from a well one. Keep on in this way an' you'll be ther pride o' ther Goffs—or ther thorn, jest es they handles ye."

With this compliment Bob took his departure. Mrs. Callahan had made a timely retreat, and the Bowery Badger left the house without a suspicion that their valuable secret was already in danger.

CHAPTER VI.

GAMIN BOB STRIKES A TRAIL.

WHEN the Bowery Badger was once gone from the house, his thoughts turned from Sadie to the men he had seen on the pier, and their interesting talk.

"Dunno but I really orter go ter ther big-bugs o' this hyar village, but they'd laugh at me, I s'pose, jes' ther same ez usual; an' I reckon I'll paddle my own canoe. I'll drop over an' see ef Wrixley is tack, an' ef he ain't, I must git along some other way. B. Bowery, Vidocq & Co. don't ginerally git left more'n forty mild in ther wilderness."

With this consoling reflection he went to Wrixley's office, but it was locked—even Mr. Stonerod was now away.

"Don't like this, b'gosh! There's no tellin' when Wrix will turn up, an' afore then, them high-daddy conspiracioners may git in their fine work an' blow ther Sound steamer ter chaos an' kindlin'-wood. Ef I can't find Wrix, nur ther schemers, I reckon I'll hev ter board ther wessel an' put a flea in ther cap'n's east ear."

As it was already well past the hour of illuminating great Gotham, Bob next went to the Bowery stand.

He found Stumpy still brooding over his wares, but at once noticed that the lame boy's face bore an anxious, frightened look.

"Hello!" he said, genially. "W'ot malign infloence has operated onter yer animyle speerits?"

"Oh! Bob, there has a man been along here who took out a can o' dynamite and threatened to throw it at me because I wouldn't give him any peanuts," said Stumpy, rapidly.

He did, hey? Wal, he was ginorous inclined, but he hadn't orter s'posed you would swap prime peanuts fur sech 'bustible goods ez dynamite—not fur Joseph! But w'ot were ther row?"

"He was drunk, and wanted the peanuts on credit, and I wouldn't let him have any."

"Course ye wouldn't. W'ot did he take ye fur? A flat? Ef ye did biz that way, ye'd only need a sign-board and red light ter be a free dispensary. But, say, w'y didn't ye call a copper an' hev him put in hock?"

"There wasn't any policeman in sight."

"You'd 'a' found him in Patsy McFlattery's every time; that's his beat."

"He isn't there all the the time, Bob."

"No; not when he's gettin' outside his dinner. But, say, be you sure ther rampagin' chap had dynamite?"

"He said so. It was in a can."

"So be oysters and kerosene, 'casionally. Ther man was pooty rocky, was he?"

"Yes, as ugly as a cellar Italian."

"Which way did he wanish?"

"Straight up the street."

"How long ago?"

"Five minutes, perhaps."

"No longer than that? B'gosh, I'm arter him like a dude goes fur ducats. W'ot fur a looker was he?"

Stumpy gave a hurried, but clear, description, and then away went the Badger at a rapid pace.

"I'll find him ef it lays in ther books. I'm sorter interested in all dynamite critters, an' ef I kin run this chap into quod, mebbe I kin bulge my vest pocket wi' bullion ez a reward."

Incited by such thoughts, he hurried up the Bowery, much to the discomfort of sundry people with whom he collided in his haste. He could not stop to pay attention to growling, however; all his attention was directed to looking for the man Stumpy had described.

He had nearly reached Fourth avenue when his labors were rewarded. Looking ahead he saw a man who seemed to deserve more than a passing glance.

The stranger was quiet enough then, but his slightly unsteady gait showed that he had more liquor aboard than was good for him.

The street scout rapidly summed him up:

"Tall an' loose-j'inted; slouchy dressed in gray; boots run over at side; red hair an' whiskers; wears a soft hat wi' seven different shapes to it. Ef that ain't ther measly dynamiter Stumpy

figured out, I'm no detective—not fur Joseph. I'll gambol 'long in his rear."

Not a doubt existed in the boy's mind, and he began his dogging with a skill and patience an old thief-catcher might have envied.

Where the red-haired man went he was bound to follow.

Pursuing him without trouble, he was led up Fourth avenue to Fourteenth street, where the pursued tried to enter a musical resort, but was ejected as a disgrace to the place.

Finding himself left on the sidewalk he occupied the next few minutes in cursing, but, seeing a patrolman approach, beat a retreat up Third avenue.

At nineteenth street he turned to the right and walked on until he reached a good-sized building, the door of which stood open and showed a light within.

"Business buildin', with some sort o' a dance or party goin' on—most likely, a ball thar."

Such was the spy's verdict as he looked at it, and a little further survey enabled him to remember seeing it before. He had once delivered a letter there, and had a fair idea of the internal arrangement.

"Jest ther place fur crooked work, b'gosh! an' ez this hyar measly critter goes in ez though he owned ther hull shop, reckon I'll meander in arter him an' see w'ot is up."

The Badger followed the man carefully up two flights of stairs.

They were then on the same floor with the ball, and, looking in, Gamin Bob saw that it was no ball, but a dozen people who seemed to have been rehearsing a play, or music, or something of the kind.

They were just leaving, however, and so near the door that the Gamin saw no way to escape discovery except to follow the red-haired man up the additional stairs.

In that quarter all was nearly dark, though a dim light somewhere in the rear, and the free manner of the man, told that he knew where he was going.

Perhaps it was well for the Badger that his quarry had so much liquor aboard, for he never once looked around.

At the top of the stairs was a small space where the unknown's feet rung on level floor, and then he rapped at a door.

Bob paused and listened.

The man got no answer.

He repeated the knock, and then, as all continued silent, broke out impatiently:

"Divil take yez, why don't ye kim along an' open dhe dure? Oi'd loike ter know."

Apparently there was a cautious answer, for in a moment he fiercely added:

"Who dhe Ould Boy should it be but meself, Pat Merrigan? Open dhe dure, or Oi'll smash it in wid me foot!"

There was an instant rattling of a key, and then the door opened.

"Divil take yez, yer ould bones are gittin' stiffer than iver, Oi should say."

"Softly, softly!" answered a small, feminine-like voice, which, nevertheless, was that of a man. "I fear me ver' mooch you have been drink again."

"Bet yer boots Oi hev, me boy, an' who's a better roight? Hould yer tongue on that p'int an' talk sinse. Begorra, whin Oi want ter come in, in Oi come."

"Mon ami, you gave not ze password."

"Ould Nick take dhe password; Oi've no time to bother wid it—Oi'm too happy."

"Begorra, me name is Patsy McCree; Oi live in dhe top ave a blackthorn tree; To live widout work is me patent fat trick, An' Oi'm a bould, darlin' son ave St. Patrick."

"Whoopee, how's dhat fur melody, Ould Frinch Bones!"

Merrigan had recovered his good humor, and he sung the quoted words in a rollicking voice, accompanied by a sound which seemed a slap on his companion's shoulder.

"Be silent, be silent!" cried the small voice, imploringly. "Mon ami, will you remember well ze true fact zat we must no noise make?"

"Oh, go tell that to dhe marines. Shut dhe dure, Ould Frinch Bones, an' sample me whiskey—"

The Bowery Boy heard no more. The door was closed, and he was left in total darkness.

The people who had been in the hall had gone their way also, and a clang from below left the street spy with the unpleasant opinion that he had been locked into the building. Possibly the door was merely closed, but he feared something more had been done.

"Wal, w'ot's that got ter do wi' these here cherubs? I ambled in hyar fur ter investigate,

an' I'm goin' on wi' ther procesh ef ther dynamite don't blow up an' sling me up among ther stars, garters, moons an' other ethereal orbs. Wonder ef I kin hear w'ot's bein' said?"

The boy ascended the remaining steps and found the door. There was a light beyond it, and he heard the sound of voices, but that was all.

"B'gosh! I can't ketch a word hyar. W'ot's ter be did? Wish I'd brung an ear-trumpet or telephone. Say, you two night-owls, raise yer warble so't I kin drink it in. Nary raise. Be I goin' ter be so all-firedly left ez this? Strikes me I hear an innard voice chant, 'You be, B. Bowery!'"

He laid his hand somewhat recklessly on the door, and then met with a surprise. The knob turned and the door opened.

Gamin Bob stood still. He had heard the key turn, but it now occurred to him that Merrigan had been "pawing over" his companion with the unreasoning affection inspired by liquor, when the latter tried to shoot the bolt, and the attempt had been a failure.

Be that as it might, the door was now ajar; the boy had not been detected; and he had a clear view of the room.

It was long and narrow, and filled with all kinds of rubbish—boards, empty barrels and cases, and divers other things—which served to make it look more like a farm-house garret than anything else.

A kerosene lamp burned at one end, and Merrigan and the other man were standing near it.

The latter was a tall, very slender man, with a sharp face and attenuated limbs, and jet-black hair and beard. His dress was all black, except a collar, and as the coat was cut long it brought the peculiarities of his thin person into greater prominence.

He was now trying to keep off Merrigan, who was determined that he should drink.

"No! no! no!" cried the Frenchman, "I will not ze stuff touch. You know I drink not ze accursed fire zat steal away men's brains. Go wiz yourself alone, and let me be wiz myself alone."

"Begorra, ye're an ould snappin'-turtle; dhat's phat ye be, Ould Frinch Bones!" growled the Irishman, who thereupon gave up the attempt. "Who care's whether ye drink or not? Sure, there'll be dhe more fur me."

And he elevated a flask to his mouth.

The spy remained watching, though without the faith which had led him there. This boisterous Irishman, with his flask of whisky, and all his thoughts fixed on the flask, seemed like anything but a dynamiter.

The only thing to offset all this was the old loft, with its singular array of barrels, boxes and other rubbish.

What were they all there for?

"Oi had some fun coming up dhe Bowery," said Merrigan, as he finished his drink. "Had a row wid a slump ov a chap who kept a peanut stand, an' tried ter git soom nuts on tick, an' whin dhe galoot refused, Oi just made bel'ave Oi had some dynamite wid me. Begorra, ye should 'a' seen the waggabone turrin pale. Ha! ha!"

"What!" cried the Frenchman, excitedly; "did you tell to him zat you had dynamite?"

"Sure, an' Oi did."

"Fool! fool! fool!" and the Frenchman beat his head with his hand, reckless of the pain he produced.

"Who's a fool?" demanded Merrigan, belligerently.

"You! You are ze fool; ze stupid fool! Sacré! how often must I to you tell zat you shall nevaire ze dynamite mention out ave zis office? Stupid, will you both of us ruin? What if ze man ze police tell? Oh! mon Dieu, ze police will find us out and hang us to ze gallows, by gar!"

He was very much excited, and made divers wild gestures; but Merrigan, after his first surprise was over, laughed at the idea and scoffed at danger.

"You are von fool!" retorted his companion. "Oh! why did I you take in ze partnersheep? You know not zat ze great virtue in all sings is to keep you your mouth closed tight an' shut."

The Irishman now grew angry, and a wrangle ensued which was very interesting to the Bowery boy.

He learned thereby that the Frenchman was named Dupré, and was a manufacturer of dynamite. His assistant in the work was Merrigan, who was only a workman, and knew little about the disposition of the stuff, while the hall below was occupied by a German society.

Several nations were thus represented in the building, but only Dupré knew why dynamite

was stored in the loft, if it was stored there, or why it was made.

Gamin Bob overheard all that was said, but heard nothing that was particularly interesting, and he was thinking of trying to beat a retreat, when affairs took an unpleasant turn.

A sound just below him was followed by steps which plainly showed that some one was ascending the stairs.

The Badger was caught between the unknown and the dynamiters, much like a rat in a box!

CHAPTER VII.

TROUBLE FOR THE BADGER.

GAMIN BOB quickly realized his danger and turned for a way out of it. If the man continued to ascend the stairs he would surely discover him, and then the dynamiters would know a spy was after them.

He also suspected that the stranger was their ally.

Discovery must be avoided if possible.

At his left was another door, but this was locked, and his last way of escape was cut off.

He could only move by entering the loft.

As this conviction flashed upon him, he looked inside. Dupré and Merrigan were several yards away, and neither was looking toward the door. Seeing this, the gamin's resolution was quickly taken.

"Nothin' ventured, nothin' had," he grimly muttered; and then he passed through the door with the caution of a cat.

He seemed very close to the dynamiters then, and if either glanced toward the door, discovery was inevitable.

The boy's coolness did not desert him for a moment. With a steady hand he closed the door, and then glided toward the darkest part of the loft. Every instant he expected a loose board to creak under his feet, and he had read Dupré well enough to suspect that the man would hesitate at no crime.

Discovery might mean death.

The dynamiters talked on, however, and saw nothing, and the spy soon reached the further side of the room. Here he looked for a hiding-place, and seeing a case with the cover laid loosely on top, crawled inside and adjusted the boards over him.

"By ther howlin' Boreas, I'm inter ther confines o' Dynamite-land now, fur sure, an' it kinder percolates through my noddle that I kin smell saltpeter an' brimstone. That 'ere Frenchman ain't w'ot would be called an angelical cherub—not fur Joseph."

"I've been in all sorts o' mud-holes an' quicksands in my ewentful c'reer, but this mernopolizes ther bun, b'gosh. Hello, t'other critter cracks ther panel!"

This was the gamin's way of saying that some one had rapped. Such was the case; a knock had sounded at the door, and Dupré at once became as mysterious as a stage-conspirator.

Bending his tall form, he laid one hand dramatically on his lips.

"Hist! hist!" he whispered. "It may be zat ze police haf come."

"Mebbe dhey ain't," growled Merrigan. "Ef Oi'm no liar, that is Dave Crowe's knock. Answer him, Ould Frinch Bones."

Dupré brightened and moved toward the door just as the knock was repeated.

He then uncovered an opening in the wall, and several words passed between him and the other man—words Bob could not distinguish, but so satisfactory to Dupré that he turned to open the door.

He then discovered that he had before failed to lock it, and this caused him to swear volubly.

The door opened, and a short, fat man entered. He greeted both the others jovially, looked around the loft and genially asked:

"How's dynamite?"

"Bad, ver' bad," replied Dupré, making sure he had locked the door this time. "Ah! Mynheer Jung, you should a Socialist be."

"Not I," Jung replied, shrugging his shoulders. "It is true my brother is—a—what he is, but I prefer the peaceful trade of dealing in flower bulbs."

Mr. Jung spoke very fair English, except when he stumbled over an occasional word. Bowery Bob, closely watching set him down as a Hollander.

"An' have not you come to buy ze dynamite at all?" pathetically asked Dupré.

"Not I. I'm of the miluk-and-water order, as the Americans say, and no dynamiter. But there is one thing I do want, Monsieur Dupré."

"Vateez zat?"

"A dry-goods case. I want to send some

flower bulbs to Providence, where I have a large order."

"Good! If I can no sell you ze dynamite, I vill sell ze case. Come zis vay, mynheer, an' you s'all see ze case."

All this ought not to have been of interest to the Bowery Boy, but, unfortunately, it was.

They advanced straight toward the box in which he was concealed.

The full sense of his peril flashed upon him, but it brought no fear. He had not spent so much of his life along the east-side streets and wharves without getting a good deal of coolness, and he showed it now. Keeping his place, he quietly awaited the result.

"Here is ze box zat you want," said Dupré. "Zis ees large an' strong, and in it you can sheep all ze bulbs you desiree."

"Haven't you a smaller one? It seems too large," replied Jung.

"Ah! but eet ees smaller in ze middle of ze inside, mynheer. Please to look an' see for yourself. I assure you zat you vill be surprised—"

Monsieur Dupré stopped short. He had lifted the cover partly off the case when the entrapped boy rose to his feet and stood facing them. He was "in for it," and as half-way measures would do no good, he came up as coolly as can be imagined.

There had been a surprise, but not of the nature expected by Dupré.

The chief dynamiter stared at the gamin in speechless consternation. The stubborn hair of his head seemed to bristle with fear.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" he cried, "vat ees zis? Oh, my soul, eet eez von spy, an' we s'all all be to ze guillotine sent an' cut off from our heads off, by gar!"

"Jest hol' yer hosses, Frenchy, an' not git in sech a rip-tearin' passion," returned the lad, promptly. "I hain't no de'statin' eperdermic, a-tall, but jes' merely a kid w'ot hez got inter ther wrong bake-shop. Don't be skeered, fur I won't hurt ye—not fur Joseph!"

But M. Dupré began to wring his hands wildly.

"Ah! ah! ah! I am von ruined man!" he cried. "I shall be wiz ze guillotine beheaded by ze police. Oh, I am ze ruin av ze old man."

"You do seem sorter weak in ther top story," coolly replied Bob, still standing in the box. "Reckon ez how ye've contracted softenin' o' ther brain, or lice. Say, hol' on, or ye'll wring ther ile all outer yer finger-jints."

He was trying to make light of the matter, but Jung, who had been looking at him excitedly, suddenly dashed to ruin all his hopes of getting off easily.

"Dupré, who is this boy?"

"I know not."

"Then he is a spy; you can depend on that. Merrigan, guard the door."

"W'ot's ther matter wi' the door?" coolly asked Bob. "Be you afeerd it is another measly spy? See hyar, Mister Jung, you're clean off yer pedestal—you be. I'm no more dang'rous than a week-old kitten."

"He is a spy—a spy!" shrilly declared Dupré.

"Oh, come off!" advised the undaunted boy. "Hev I ther piercin' eye an' broken nose o' a emissary o' anybody? Not fur Joseph! I'm a free-born 'Merican citizen, wi' a clean bill o' health an' vaccination mark on my arm, b'gosh!"

As lightly as Gamin Bob talked, he did not fail to see that he was in a serious predicament. Three scowling faces confronted him; even Jung, who had lately been so smiling, looked fierce and menacing now.

"Let me talk wi' him," said Merrigan. "Boy, who be yez?"

"Hey?"

"What's yer name?"

"George Washington Winks," promptly responded the Gamin.

"Where do ye live?"

"On ther piers."

"What pier?"

"Any one where I zin git a snooze. I ain't pertic'ler. I'm a—w'ot-d'ye-call-it?—cosmopolitan sort o' a youth, d'ye see?"

"What are yez doin' hyar?"

"Standin' in a box."

Dupré stamped his foot.

"*Sacré*, you're a spy!" he hissed, shaking his fist in the boy's face.

"Nary spy! ole hoss-fly; I ain't no measly sneak, an' my name ain't '*Sacré*'—not fur Joseph! Make a note on't, will ye? Call me G. W., or simply Winks."

"Why are you here?" asked Jung.

"Jes' ter git a nap."

"Don't lie to us. This door is kept closed all the time. How did you get in?"

"Come down ther chimbly."

"It don't enter this room."

"Did I say it did? Not fur Joseph! I said I entered, not ther chimbly."

"Ah!" interrupted Dupré, in his usual shrill voice, "vy should we waste vords with zisgamin? He is a spy of our enemies, an', by ze bones of Napoleon, he s'all die like von dog wiz zis knife!"

And he drew from his coat a glittering weapon, the steel of which was over a foot long. Bob, however, looked at him coolly.

"Go 'way; that ain't ther style fur ter dispose o' dogs. 'Sides, you ain't no licensed dog-catcher, an' I ain't no dog, though I hev got a grip wu'th havin'. Jes' put up that carver an' le's talk sorter amiable, jes' fur a change."

"Boy, how did you come in?" asked Jung.

"Walked in on my hind legs."

"Why did you come?"

"Wanted a place fur ter sleep."

"It is von spy!" interrupted Dupré. "You are a spy, an' you shall ze death av a dog die."

"Oh, say, give us a rest, will ye? Yer tongue wobbles 'round in a way wearisome ter delicate ears."

"Merrigan, watch the boy while we talk," abruptly directed Jung.

"Oi will, an' Oi'll wipe him wan in dhe jaw ef his tongue don't run less," growled Merrigan.

So the other men went aside and began to talk earnestly, while the Irishman kept his place and glared fiercely at the Gamin.

The latter plainly saw that he was in a bad fix. With his experience about New York, and her diversified mass of people, he could read these fellows well enough to see that not one of them would hesitate to commit any lawless deed that might serve to protect themselves from danger.

He had been caught in their den, and as he no longer doubted that they had important secrets to hide, he expected hard usage. Despite what Jung had said, he seemed one of the gang.

Bob's face betrayed nothing of his feelings, though, and he appeared far more at ease than the men.

Dupré and Jung returned after fifteen minutes' earnest, and, at first, excited, conversation.

"Boy," said the latter, "are you going to confess?"

"Confess w'ot?"

"Why you are here."

"Ain't I tol' ye I come in fur ter get a place ter sleep?"

"That won't do."

"Why won't it?"

"Because it is false."

"Who says so?"

"Why do you talk nonsense? We know you are a spy for some one, and you may as well speak plainly. Were you sent by the police?"

"Nixy! I paddle my own dug-out an' let ther p'lice do ther same. Nobody sent me, an' I'm a full-blooded perivate cit'zen, an' not ter be sent or driv by nobody. I'm no bonded slave, wi' shackles onter me—not fur Joseph, thank you."

"You talk very well, but it won't work," harshly returned Jung. "We know you are lying, and shall deal with you accordingly. You shall pay the penalty for spying on us. The penalty is—death!"

CHAPTER VIII. IN A BAD BOX.

THIS startling assertion was met by the Bowery Boy with his usual *sangfroid*.

"Oh, gammon!" he exclaimed, coolly.

"Not that we are foolish enough to kill you here," added Jung, "where we have no facilities for disposing of your body. No; although such was my friend's wish, we shall not kill you here. I have planned it better. You seem to have a fondness for that box."

"Wal, 'tain't no great shakes for a box," Bob steadily answered, "but ez I afore said, it's a fair sort o' a bed inter which ter recline my aged bones an' snooze."

"You shall have all the chance you desire. We are going to bind you, hand and foot, pack you in the box, and ship you to Boston. There our agents will receive you, take the box out in the harbor and sink it in the water."

"Kinder a wet job," commented the boy.

"We shall see. It will not be the first time I've packed men thus, and I shall take care that you get there in safety."

"Thank ye fur nothin'."

"We will now proceed to the work."

"Shall I hol' a glim while ye pack me?"

"You will keep silent."

"Will I? Who sez so? D'ye take me fur a

dumb man? Obsarve anything 'bout me ter 'mind ye o' a marble statoo? Mebbe ye think all it needs is a few wires ter hol' my j'int in place, an' I'd be a ginooine Egyptian mummy, wi' tanned sole-leather fur a cuticle."

Gamin Bob's tongue ran freely, but he was far from feeling at ease. There was an implacable earnestness about the mysterious men which showed that they meant all they said, and he expected no mercy.

Add to this that indefinable dread which all honest people have for knaves who act in secret, and with unlawful means, and it is no injustice to Bob to say that he had never before felt so ill at ease.

After some further conversation it was decided to use a larger box than the one already spoken of, but as it would take some time to prepare it as Jung wished, they decided to temporarily nail him into the first one.

This was done, despite his struggles.

When the boards were fastened above him, he found himself alone and in what would have been total darkness had it not been for a large knot-hole in one side which admitted air and a shaft of light.

This opening they did not seem to see; at least, it was not mentioned.

"Wal, b'gosh, hyar I be," muttered the Bowery Boy. "I didn't never s'pect ter git inter sech a fix ez this, though Wrixley says a detective hez ter go through every s'perience knowed ter man afore he kin claim ter be full-blowed member o' ther craft. Wal, let her twinkle; I reckon B. Bowery, Vidocq & Co. kin stand ther rifle. Our bones ain't made o' chalk. On ther hull, ef they send me ter Boston it'll save expense o' goin' thar ter see 'bout them chaps that is workin' ther gallus scheme ter blow ther Sound steamer to chaos an' kindlin'-wood, an' ef ther baggage-smashers don't set me up on my head, nur the drink in Boston harbor don't wet me too much, mebbe I kin find Wrixley thar an' go snucks wi' him ter save ther steamer. So drive on yer go-cart, Mr. Dynamiter, an' ther Bowery Badger will hang on till ther tail board bu'sts!"

He reclined in the box with his eye at the knot-hole, taking matters as coolly as possible and watching his enemies.

They did not seem in any hurry to arrange the other box, but sat down near the stove and talked earnestly.

From their frequent glances toward the box, he suspected that he was the subject of their remarks.

He could hear nothing, however.

In this way an hour rolled past and then, once more, a knock sounded at the door.

The dynamiters at once showed signs of alarm, and it was not until the knock was repeated that they found their tongues. Then Dupré grew alarmed.

"The police!" he said, in a frightened whisper.

"Divil a police!" returned Merrigan. "It is some one who knows us, Oi'll bet me hat. Try de peep-hole, Ould Frinch Bones."

It was not until Jung repeated the advice that Dupré could be induced to do so. He was not usually afraid, but the events of the evening had upset him.

He finally ventured to the door, and a colloquy ensued which proved so satisfactory to him that he turned the key.

Gamin Bob could not see who entered, but Dupré's voice arose assuring him he was welcome, and then he was conducted to the stove.

He was thus brought into the boy's view, and the latter saw a fleshy man of middle age who, he at once decided, was no foreigner. From that time he could see all, but hear nothing.

The new-comer shook hands with Jung and Merrigan, who assured him they were glad to see him.

"Sit down, Mr. Walkington, sit down," said Dupré, with extreme politeness.

"I will," replied the visitor. "I cannot remain long, but I wish to arrange our little affair."

Dupré glanced quickly toward the box.

"Speak in a lower voice," he said, anxiously.

"Why? Is there any one else here?" asked Walkington, turning.

"No, no! Zere is no one," hastily answered Dupré.

"Then why such caution? My voice is not a loud one."

"True, Mr. Walkington, true; but you know ze old saying zat walls have ears. Zis matter is von to be spoke silent of, sair."

"Just as you say; no one is more anxious for secrecy than myself. My partner, Mr. Goff,

tells me he has made a bargain with you for the dynamite-box."

"He has, sair."

"Well, what are the arrangements?"

"Just as it was said between us before, sair. We will place on ze steamair a box wiz dynamite in it, an' a machine like a clock, so arrange zat it shall explode at ze hour of four. At zat time ze steamair will be on ze broad Sound of Long Island, and it will go up—so!"

And Mr. Dupré threw up his hands illustratively.

"You warrant the box?"

"We do, sair. Ef it no bu'st, no pay."

"You ought to do a good job, with your experience," and Mr. Walkington glanced around the room.

"We do, sair. Nobody excels me in zis line, sair."

"It seems a trifle hard to blow up a hundred or two passengers on the boat, also," observed Jung.

"Don't you approve of it?" sharply demanded Mr. Walkington.

"It is none of my business," discreetly answered Jung. "If you can make money, go on."

Mr. Walkington smiled, and his voice was as bland and gentle as ever when he spoke again.

"I shall make some money, but these are hard times."

"We shall ship ze dynamite so zat ze police will nevaire know where to place ze blame," continued Dupré.

"Take common precautions, and I'll be sworn that you'll never be tracked. I have a cat's-paw in the case; a discharged clerk whom I've reëngaged and shall send along. When the steamer is in fragments, and my dupe down among the mermaids, it will be said that he blew up the steamer for revenge."

As the full measure of wily Mr. Walkington's scheme dawned upon the dynamiters, they laughed in concert, and Dupré pronounced him a second Napoleon and brought a bottle of wine from a corner, which all proceeded at once to sample.

Jung gave a toast, "Here's to your cat's-paw!" which was drank with enthusiasm.

All this the Bowery Badger saw, though no distinct speech reached his ears. Mr. Walkington interested him a good deal, and he eyed him closely, resolved not to forget his broad face.

He would have given a good deal to hear what was said. He had not forgotten that the man he had heard plot with the man he called Hank, on the pier, had said that his partner would call on the dynamiters and arrange the final points about the blowing up of the Sound steamer.

Now, here were several dynamiters, and here was a man who looked sleek and comfortable enough to be a merchant. Was he the man mentioned on the pier?

Gamin Bob considered the point carefully, and, lacking decisive evidence either way, resolved to give attention to this corpulent man when he regained his liberty—if he ever did.

After some time Mr. Walkington prepared to go, and was escorted out by Dupré with some ceremony.

Then the loft was closed, and the three men began working with hammers and saws. They were at such a point that Bob could see nothing, but he suspected that they were preparing the box in which he was to be sent away, and the knowledge was far from pleasant.

"B'gosh, I don't see ther sense o' so much red tape. Ef they want ter drown'd me, w'y don't they jest take me over ter ther East river an' chuck me in? 'Twould be easier, an' I'm more at home in local waters. Hows'ever, I suspect them measly idjits ain't goin' ter consult my ideas fur a cent."

It took Jung a long time to get his box ready, and then there was a lull in proceedings, so that it was well on toward the end of night when the first box was opened and Gamin Bob allowed to rise.

"So yez is still hyar?" said Merrigan, grimly.

"Hyar? Wal, I should snicker," the gamin coolly replied. "Whar did ye s'pose I was? Settin' on ther top o' ther obelisk in ther Park, or runnin' a ferryboat ter Staten Island? Not any fur Joseph! Look sharp, Mister Man, an' you'll see me dead ahead wi' my awful eye on yer figurehead, ez ther shark said ter Chris Columbus—you knew Chris, didn't ye, ole man?"

"Silence!" ordered Jung.

"W'ot's that?—anything good fur ter eat?"

"You want to curb your tongue."

"I'm no hoss-jockey. Don't git off none o'

ther measly, demon-oralizin' turf-talk ter me," returned irrepressible Bob.

"We're about to give you a breakfast."

"Thank ye fur nothin'. I kin pay fur all I eat."

"Be still, and let me finish. We ship you by rail at an early hour this morning. The box containing you will reach Boston at seven-thirty in the evening, and be claimed at once by our Boston agents. They will take it out in a boat and sink it in Boston harbor, with you aboard."

"Hol' on, admiral, hol' on! I ain't a board, an' I sha'n't be a board, an' you can't sink me fur no ole lumber. I'm George Wash Winks, alderman an' liquor-dealer in this hyar free an' 'lightened city, an' you can't pass me off fur no lumber—not fur Joseph!"

"Sacré!" cried Dupré, "he is von fool. He understands not. He is von escaped idiot, b'gar!"

"Don't you believe it," retorted Jung. "The fellow's head is longer than you suspect. Boy, let me finish, and then you can put in all of your cheap talk you feel like voicing, but I won't hear. What I want to impress on your mind is the fact that though you must die this evening, you shall be well cared for until then. Hence, we will give you a good breakfast before being packed."

"Wal, now that's a kindness w'ot is a kindness. 'Tain't ev'ry kind o' merchandise gits sech a show. Waltz out yer pervisions. Gimme two dozen eysters, a couple juvenile chickens on toast, a dozen o' champagne, an'—"

"That's enough!" harshly interrupted Jung.

"I were only gwine fur to add, a bottle o' cod-liver ile. Please, Mr. Man, throw in ther ile!"

Gamin Bob's manner was as sober as though he meant all he said, but the angry dynamiters would not answer him.

Merrigan set out a quantity of plain food, and when invited the prisoner fell to and ate with a relish. Trouble did not affect his appetite, and he believed in preparing for the fast before him.

All this while he was closely watched, despite the fact that the only way of escape was through the windows, and they far above the ground.

Dupré sat with a revolver near his hand, and he plainly informed the Bowery Boy that if he tried to escape he would be shot down at once.

When Bob had finished eating he was escorted to the box in which he was to make his journey to Boston.

The Hollander had worked well and produced an arrangement which justified his claim of previous experience.

By his contrivance a resting-place had been made which would certainly not be uncomfortable until the victim became tired of confinement, and holes through the box admitted air.

Its general construction was explained to Bob, and then his hands and feet were tied, a scarf bound over his mouth, and he was ready for packing.

When one of the trains left New York for Boston that morning a large box went among the other things in the Express car.

In the box was the Bowery Boy, tied up like a Christmas turkey, as he expressed it, and having a most undesirable ride.

His quarters were not so cramped as might be supposed, and air had thus far been vouchsafed him, but he was in fear of some accident which would shut off the supply and suffocate him.

And thus he was whirled on toward Boston—on to meet the knaves who were to sink him in the waters of Boston harbor.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LOST TREASURE.

AFTER her champion, Bob, had left, Sadie Bird settled down to pass the evening alone. She was naturally of quiet tastes, and, though her life about the streets of New York had sharpened both her wits and her tongue beyond the average of her years, she preferred her own room to roaming abroad.

When she had eaten her frugal supper she brought out a well-worn book and sat down to pore over it.

It was a book of alleged easy words loaned her by Bob, and she was trying to pick up a small education as the gamin had acquired his, by her own efforts.

True, in her case, the rough boy was helping her somewhat, but his forte was not book-teach-

ing, and Sadie was laboring on with little help.

She really made good progress under the circumstances, for she was quick-witted, but her progress did not keep pace with her boundless ambition, and at the end of the evening she laid the book down with a sigh.

"It's awful tangled! I don't b'lievether man what writ it knowed w'ot he were talkin' about. W'ot does he mean when he sez, 'Mary was possessed o' great sang froid,' I wonder? 'Froid' may be Latin fur *fried*, an' mebbe she had a good squar' meal."

"Ag'in, *sang froid* may be some sort o' a dress or bunnit—I dunno. Oh, dear! I wish folkses was borned educated—an' rich! It's pooty tough to be so poor yer can't hev no dad nor marm."

She leaned her head on her hand and remained for some time in deep thought, but, when the clock in Mrs. Callahan's room struck nine, arose and prepared to retire.

She sold papers every morning on the street, and was thus obliged to rise early.

It was not long after the room was dark before she was asleep. She had devoted a little time to considering what she would do when Christopher Goff had acknowledged her as his niece, but did not think it prudent to build too many air-castles until Goff had done this.

Darkness and silence reigned in the room.

By and by Sadie dreamed.

She thought she was asleep under a tree in a wood, and that a panther was creeping toward her, hungry for blood. All this she saw, but the double under the tree did not stir, but slept on in fatal security.

Nearer came the panther; nearer—nearer.

Its hot breath touched the sleeper; its jaws almost closed over her shoulder.

Then Sadie awoke.

She started up with a little cry, and then saw that all her danger had not been a dream. A dim light shone before her; the light of a "dark" lantern: and in the light stood a man.

The girls of New York who fight the world hand-to-hand, in attic and street, from an early age, are not weak and cowardly, and Sadie's discovery made her more belligerent than alarmed.

"See hyar, you old scamp!" she exclaimed, "w'ot are yer doin' hyar? Git out, or I'll yell!"

Not a word answered the man, but he sprung forward with astonishing quickness and clapped his hand over Sadie's mouth, bearing her back on the bed.

She struggled to the best of her ability, but all in vain, for, as she was dimly aware, a second pair of hands came to the aid of the first, and then a strange odor greeted her nostrils.

It was chloroform, pressed tightly against her mouth and nose, and its presence there could not be mistaken.

She endeavored to avoid inhaling it.

Who these persons were, and what was their purpose, she did not know, but she realized the importance of giving an alarm.

It was important, but impossible. The chloroform did its work; she lost consciousness.

When her senses returned the room was dark and silent, and she lay just as when she fell asleep. A less practical person might have imagined that all that had gone before was a dream.

Not so Sadie. She remembered all, and, springing from the bed, she hurriedly struck a match and started a light.

The room had no occupant besides herself. Whoever had been there had gone, and left no, as yet, perceptible sign behind him. Sadie had no money or jewels to lose, and, knowing there was nothing to tempt ordinary burglars, she was for a few minutes perplexed.

The door was locked, but the key lay on the floor instead of in its usual place, and she easily realized that the lock had been picked, but that the intruders, in their retreat, had used the key and then thrust it back under the door.

"Wal, that 'ere is sorter queer. Hyar I be, safe an' sound, an' no vallables carried off, 'ca'se thar war none ter carry, an' yit— Wal, I reckon them measly critters didn't git no great haul. Hyar's my forty-one cents safe in my shoe, an' ther chloroform must 'a' cost suthin'. Queer perceedin', all through."

So it did seem at first, but the girl gave a great start as a sudden thought occurred to her. Then she ran quickly to the bed and snatched off the bed-post cap which Bowery Bob had removed when he hid Mrs. Bird's confession in the hollow of the post.

One of her hands flashed down the hollow.

Then her face grew dismayed.

The paper was gone!

Yes, the confession of her once-supposed mo-

ther—the document upon which she had relied to prove that she was the niece of Christopher Goff—had disappeared.

She stood like a statue for several seconds, her face still wearing the dismayed look. No need of explanation to her. She knew at last what the night-prowlers had taken, and she would not have been the quick-witted girl she was had she failed to believe that it was for the paper they had come.

"Chris Goff were at ther bottom on't; he were, fur sure. Ther mean old miser ain't willin' I should hev w'ot b'longs ter me, an' this is ther way he takes ter pervent it. He's got ther 'fession, an' I reckon I've got a tough row ter hoe now, but ef I don't yank up ther weeds right lively, I'll let Chris keep all ther bullion. I jest wish I could git my fingers inter his hair!"

Sadie doubled her small fist, but it soon occurred to her that this was not the way to help her cause.

She had been robbed, and it behooved her to make prompt efforts to recover the lost treasure.

Accordingly she dressed with celerity, left the room and the house. There was no one inside upon whom she could rely, and she knew it.

She went at once to a police station, where the sergeant on duty was surprised to see the small apparition which appeared to him.

The girl explained, but the sergeant did not show any great enthusiasm. Taken all-in-all, the story sounded to him remarkably like a fiction. That such a ragged girl could be the niece of a rich New Yorker seemed impossible, and he decided that it was either a hoax or part of a blackmailing scheme.

So Sadie, instead of finding her cause espoused, was directed to go home and call again at ten o'clock in the forenoon.

She obeyed, but her steps were slow and heavy. The sergeant had not spoken bluntly, but she realized the truth and suspected that her appeal to the police would come to nothing.

Slowly she returned to her room, and there sat down with her chin on her hands, and, looking into the flame of her lamp, thought with an earnestness and purpose few girls of her years could approach.

"This here 'currence complerates business, an' I dunno whar 'twill end. Chris hes got a whack at ther biz an' won a big p'int, an' how I'm ter meet him I dunno. I wouldn't give six cents fur all ther p'lice will do fur me, an' I reckon I've got ter rely on Bob. He's got nerve enough, ef only he were a man, or looked like one. That's ther main p'int ag'in' us; looks is; fur Bob is no baby."

The girl had spoken the truth, and the same remark would also apply to her. She was a child in years, but a woman in experience.

There is no educator like poverty and the streets of a great city. The girl who lives such a life is wiser than the woman of fifty who lives a life made up of home experience and occasional shopping excursions.

Poverty in a great city! A battle for bread in the streets of New York! Only those who have had actual experience know what these words imply. How such a life sharpens the wits, ages the brain, makes childhood a myth and womanhood a dweller in a small body; how these things are the rich of New York do not know, and the mature woman who lives in some country town until her years are two-score and ten, would find herself a child beside the city child, and the city child a woman beside her, and the real child older in sharp, bitter experience and worldly shrewdness than herself.

Sadie slept no more that night, but as soon as such a thing was possible, set off to find the Badger.

She did not find him, though she was soon in conversation with Stumpy.

The latter's face bore a very sober look, and he reported that he had not seen his partner since dark the previous evening. The young detective had not been at their humble lodging-house during the night, and as he had last been seen following a drunken man up the Bowery, Stumpy was worried.

"Not but Bob often stays away overnight, but I can't get used to it. I'm afraid he will get into trouble."

"I want ter see him awful bad," explained Sadie.

"So do I."

"Where can he be?"

Stumpy shook his head.

"Might as well guess on a wild bird."

"I've got ter see him!"

Stumpy's face clouded.

"Are you in trouble?"

"Yes."

"Can't I help you?"

Sadie looked astonished at the idea. What, she mentally asked, could a small, lame boy like Stumpy do against Christopher Goff?

She left him without explanation, only bidding him send Bob around as soon as he appeared, and then wandered slowly away.

Of course she had no thought of selling papers that morning, and she scarcely knew what she was doing, more than to "kill time" when she paused on a street corner and looked at the articles arranged in a show-window with eyes that scarcely saw.

She was standing thus when two men came along and paused near her.

"Are you going to the store now, Ballard?"

"No, Mr. Jung. My employers have directed me to go to Boston on business for them, and I am just on my way to depart."

"Do you stay long?"

"Oh! no; I return to-morrow night."

"By rail?"

"No; on a Sound steamer."

"Are Walkington & Goff good men to work for?" asked Mr. Jung.

Sadie had listened listlessly until she heard the names spoken, but she now grew interested and looked at both the speakers more closely.

"Very good," Ballard answered.

"Is their business good?"

"Very fair," hesitatingly replied the young man.

"I suppose, one of these days, David Ballard will be a member of the firm?"

"I don't expect to live to see that day."

A peculiar smile flitted across Jung's face. Remembering the can of dynamite he had arranged for passage on the same steamer with Ballard, he was very much of the opinion that Walkington & Goff's cat's-paw never would live to see that day; in fact, that he would live to see but few more days, anyway.

"Well, I haven't much time to waste, for I must go over on Broadway and fill an order for some *bulubs*," Jung said, aloud; and then he shook hands with David Ballard and both turned away.

The latter, who carried a small traveling valise, hurried toward the Bowery, for he was already started on that journey which, if Walkington & Goff's plans did not miscarry, was destined to send him to eternity with his name blackened by a crime of which he knew nothing.

Jung, however, walked only until he was free from observation, and then looked at his watch and sauntered back.

Sadie was watching him suspiciously, and when a second man appeared and joined him, she listened eagerly. They were just around the corner, and she could hear all.

"You're late, Hank," said Jung.

"So I be, but I've been busy."

"Doing what?"

"You can't guess."

"Well, tell me, then."

"I've been doin' a job fur ther ole man."

"Dupré?"

"Nonsense; no. I mean Goff."

"Hush! Not so loud."

"Ther' ain't no danger."

"Caution is never thrown away. But what did you do for Goff?"

"A bit o' housebreakin'."

"If Sadie had been interested before, she was doubly interested now, and her face began to glow with excitement.

"A bit of housebreaking for Goff?"

The words could not help raising a well-defined suspicion in her mind, and she looked eagerly for a policeman. None was in sight.

"Where was the work done?" asked Jung.

"That's tellin', boss. You an' me are good friends, but I can't a'ford ter hang myself. That Goff is a gallus bird, though, now, you bet yer boots."

"And rich."

"Jest so."

"Well, Merrigan—"

"Call me Hank."

"I will. What I want to say to you is that we have a fine chance to bleed Mr. Christopher Goff. His faith in Dupré has led to his placing himself squarely in our power in the dynamite affair, and now, with this fresh grip, we have the bulge on him."

"Of course, Dupré won't join us, but I can see more money in bleeding him than in selling *bulubs*. What say—shall we unite to bleed him?"

Hank's face bore a very thoughtful expression, but as he looked past Jung he caught sight of Sadie peering around the corner.

Instantly he sprang forward like a flash,

and before she could retreat, his hand was on her shoulder.

Jung followed more moderately.

"What's this?" he nervously asked.

"A spy who has heerd all we said," answered Hank, with an oath. "Curse her, she'll ruin us. No, she won't; I'll strangle her on the spot!"

And his fingers closed over the girl's neck.

CHAPTER X.

REMARKABLE FREIGHT.

A WAGON was rattling through one of the narrow streets of Boston in that famous region known as "The Cove"—the Boston parallel for Baxter street and vicinity.

The hour was somewhat after dark, and The Cove was as quiet as it ever is. Business was suspended, and the night-owls of the dingy streets had not yet come forth to pollute the sidewalks with their presence.

The wagon before mentioned was drawn by a heap of bones covered with a white hide. People of a facetious turn of mind called this drawer a horse.

In the wagon was a box, and on this box were two men who looked as though they had been kept on the same fare as the horse, and no better used.

The wagon reached the N. Y. & N. E. depot, and then, striking Atlantic avenue, rolled northward for some distance, turned to the left, and finally drew up at a house on Richmond street.

Two other men came out, and the four then carried the box into the house and deposited it in a large, poorly-furnished room.

The wagon-men left, while the others looked attentively at the box.

"Wonder ef he's alive?" said one.

"Probably. Jung knows his business, for he's shipped many a man in Europe. He's not going to slop over at this late day."

"I'll be hanged if I should covet the ride."

"You would kick if you had a coach-and-four. Let us open the cage and see what we have. Get a hammer."

"Here it is."

"All right; now for the boy."

The speaker attacked the cover of the box, drew nails and pried off boards, and in a short time it was removed, but no boy was yet visible. He had to uncover a framework, and in the middle was seen a human form.

After some labor it was taken out, and Gamin Bob lay bound on the floor, the bandage still over his mouth, but with eyes as keen as ever.

"He's all right, you see."

"Wal, he must 'a' had a jolly ride."

The other man stooped and removed the bandage.

"How are you, boy?" he asked.

Gamin Bob moved his jaws several times, as though to lubricate them, before he answered:

"Boss," he then said, "I'm well, an' powerful glad fur ter see yer. Shake!"

"Don't be in a rush. Those cords are to stay on your wrists."

"How kin I feed myself?" the prisoner demanded, in assumed surprise.

"You can't. You won't need any food to-night, and after that—well, we'll see if you are hungry in the morning."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

The second man put in a hoarse laugh at this significant speech, but the Bowery boy looked at him scornfully.

"You laugh like a hoss, *you do!*" he said. "Don't ye sling on too much style though, fur I'm onter all ther p'int in this game. Dupré, Jung & Co. tole me ther hull riffle, an' I know I'm ter be taken ter ther harbor an' drowned, ef ye kin find water enough. W'ot on't? Folks hes b'en drowned afore, ain't they? W'ot are ye snortin' at, yer freckled-faced ape? 'Sides, w'ot ef I am ter be drowned? Is *that* any reason why I should 'buse my stomach while ther lamp holds out ter burn? Not fur Joseph! Trot out yer breadstuffs, you chaps, and let me fill up my treasury department."

"Well, you're a cool one," declared the leader of the men, "and it shall be as you say. Bring a good supper, Trot."

The man went away growling, while the leader released his prisoner. As he did so, he noticed the boy's muscular development, and thought best to draw a revolver and caution him not to attempt resistance or escape.

"Go 'way!" Gamin Bob retorted. "D'ye s'pose I'd cut stick afore gittin' my grub? Nixy! Not fur Joseph! A still, small voice wi'in me is a-cryin' from ther desert wilderness o' my stum-jack for quail on toast, an' ther voice shows mighty good jedgment. Slide in here, Mr."

Trott, an' you'll cachinnate fur ter observe how I'll slaughter venison an' Winnipeg b'ar. Can't yer git me a delicate roast from a rhinoceros's horn, Mr. Gallop?"

The last words came indistinctly, as the hungry lad attacked the food, and he said no more until he had won a notable victory and cleaned off all Trott brought.

He then turned and waved his hand to the leader.

"For which let us be duly grateful. W'ot temporal appellation shall I harness up w'en I a'dress ye by name?"

"Call me Brown."

"Wal, Brown, le's go out an' do ther town."

"Eh?"

"Le's go out wi' our little hatchet, an' paint Boston red, like as G. Washington did."

"You forget that you're a prisoner."

"You ain't, be you?"

"No."

"Wal, you kin be my sponsor, as 'twere, an' pilot me round whar ther Pilgrim Fathers landed an' hung a witch in 1473. Brown, I hanker ter see them Pilgrims! Whar is ther tree? Waltz out ther witch! Lemme 'zamine ther rope!"

"Boy, you talk too much!"

"Recollect that my jaws hev been inter hock ever sence this mornin' afore sun-up. Give 'em a show now. Say, w'ot's this box?"

The young detective's keen eyes had caught sight of a small box at one side, which was made of tin, or covered with some substance which looked like it.

He moved toward the box, but Brown sprung up as though suddenly alarmed.

"Hold on! Don't touch that!"

"Why not?"

"I say, let it alone! Isn't that enough?"

"I s'pose so, but I can't see why you are so darned pertic'lar 'bout an ole box. Lemme kick it once, jest fur luck!"

He moved forward again, but Brown caught him by the arm in unmistakable alarm and flung him back.

"Keep off!" he ordered. "Do you want to blow us all to eternity, you fool?"

"Eh? W'ot's that? How'd I blow us ter thin atmosphere?"

Brown hesitated, and showed some annoyance.

"Never mind," he said, curtly. "Just you let things alone, or you'll fare badly. Come into the next room."

He still held his revolver, and as the muzzle was pointed toward the gamin, the latter did not think best to make any attempt to escape. He was, however, resolved not to remain in the hands of the dynamiters to be drowned. He had already had enough of their style during his experience in the dry-goods case.

As for the small box which Brown would not allow him to kick, he believed he had made a discovery there.

A piece of paper was pasted on the top and bore an address, which was that of some one in New York.

Considering Brown's alarm, the sharp-witted New York lad believed that the box held the dynamite with which the gang intended to blow up the Sound steamer.

"Ef that's ther fact, I'm right onto ther rifle like a fly arter 'lasses. B'gosh, ef I kin git outer quod, I'll make ther dynamiters dance ther Devil's Dream in a skip, hop an' jump. We'll see!"

He found the next room to be a smaller one, and there he was made to sit down. He was not re-bound, though Brown once took up the old cords. He laid them down again, smiling at the idea of a boy escaping from two men.

Gamin Bob made himself at home and talked continually, and after a little experience he was able to select his language so as to amuse his captors.

He asked at what hour he was to be drowned, how it was to be done, if the water was cold, whether he stood any chance of being swallowed by a whale, as Jonah was, if the walking was as good in the harbor as in the Red Sea, and numerous other pertinent questions.

Both Brown and Trott were influenced by his manner, and the latter so far forgot his first wrath at being called "Gallop" that he declared that it was a shame to kill such a boy.

An hour passed in this way, and then the leader went to answer a ring at the door-bell, leaving Trott to guard the prisoner.

In itself this was no gain, however, for the wary dynamiter kept the revolver always bearing on the boy.

Brown and his caller entered the larger room and began to talk. Gamin Bob was nearer the

partition than Trott, and he could overhear what the latter could not—the words of the other men.

The last comer was called "Doc," and seemed to be a man of Brown's own kidney. More than this, the New York spy had his suspicions confirmed and learned beyond a shadow of doubt that the small box in the other room was that designed to blow up the Sound steamer.

It was to be set, with its clock arrangement, so that it would explode in mid-Sound, and, being marked "Glass—handle with care!" there was little danger of its being broken by concussion before the proper time.

Gamin Bob heard Dupré, Jung and Merrigan mentioned frequently in this conversation, but not a word yet revealed the fact that it was Walkington & Goff who were back of the villainous scheme.

After a while this visitor left and then Brown rejoined Bob and Trott. Then the brave boy opened squarely and tried to persuade the man to let him go, relying chiefly on the fact that he had already made a good impression.

His arguments proved unavailing, however; Brown unwaveringly declared that he should carry out the orders he had received.

In this determination he remained firm, though he acknowledged that the work was unpleasant.

He seemed to be more of a man than the other dynamiters, and the gamin wondered what had led him into such bad company.

He suspected that nothing but fear of the consequences of treachery kept him in union with them.

Brown stated that Dupré was at the head of the business, and that they had no connection with political or other parties.

They simply made dynamite as a business, but their operations were secret, and nearly all the stuff was sold for nefarious purposes.

Several hours passed, a period during which the boy was on the alert for a chance to escape, but the precautions taken by his captors proved sufficient to keep him.

At about midnight Trott brought in more food and drink, of which all partook, and it was not long before the Bowery boy began to feel strangely sleepy.

It flashed upon his mind that he had been drugged, and he made a desperate effort to rise, but his limbs seemed made of lead and he could not move. Then he seemed to float away in space and lost consciousness.

Two hours later the same wagon which had brought the box to the house, drove away down Richmond street.

Three men sat on the box, and in the bottom of the vehicle lay something which looked like a sack of potatoes, or something of the sort.

They drove east, meeting with good luck in avoiding policemen, until a wharf not far from the South Ferry was reached.

Here they sprung out, the sack was lifted from the wagon, and one man drove away with the wagon.

The others carried their burden along the wharf until the water was reached. Here one of them looked over, and seeing a boat rocking just below him, whistled softly.

"Is it you?" asked a subdued voice.

"Yes. Shall we lower the sack?"

"Of course. Down with it!"

The sack was lowered, the men followed, and then he who had occupied the boat dipped oars and pulled away.

"Have you a stone to tie to it?" a new-comer asked.

"Ay, that I have; stone enough to sink a dozen boys!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE BADGER TAKES A BATH.

It was a sinister-looking party, and sinister work was ahead. In the sack was Gamin Bob, the Bowery Badger, and the men intended to sink him in the deep water of the harbor. Brown and Trott were in charge, and if their consciences troubled them they concealed the fact perfectly.

They had been ordered to sink the prisoner, and they intended to do it.

The boatman picked his way through the thin line of shipping, and then rowed boldly away toward the southeast.

The night was dark; a fit time for the deed they had in hand; and there seemed absolutely no hope for the Bowery Badger.

Silence reigned in the boat, and they went for several minutes, the oars gliding through the water with the smooth ripple peculiar to them when pulled by a skillful waterman.

Finally he came to a halt.

"W'ot's the use o' goin' furdur?" he asked. "Play is play, an' work is work. Shall I break my back here an' no good for't? No! Dump yer cargo here; you'll find no better place."

"Perhaps it's as well," admitted Brown.

"'Course it is! Hyar's yer stone; hitch it round ther sack an' dump it."

The sack lay at the forward end of the boat, and Brown had been seated at the stern. He now passed the boatman, picked up the weight which was designed to drag Bob to a watery grave, and turned to the bag.

He laid one hand on it, paused, fumbled hastily, and then uttered an oath.

"What's ther row?" asked the boatman.

"The bag's empty!"

"Empty?"

"Yes, empty as an ole hat-box!"

The boatman had sprung up, and he now caught hold of the bag. Sure enough, there was nothing in it, and he held it up at arm's length with a very blank face.

"Where ther fiend is ther boy?" he demanded.

Instantly a cool, nonchalant voice sounded a few feet away, seeming to come from the water itself:

"Hyar I be, ole stock, a-takin' on ther bath you was so kind ez ter ship me all ther way from New York ter git. I got sorter impatient, an' come in fur ter wash on my own hook, d'ye see?"

"He's escaped!" cried Trott.

"Not yet!" added Brown. "Quick, Sam: oars, and pull for him. We'll have him yet."

"'Bout ther same time yer hev a mermaid by ther hair," scoffed the cool voice from the water. "You kin snap yer vertebrae, yer gallus land-sharks, but yer can't hev this chile fur a burnt off'rin'—not fur Joseph!"

By this time Sam had the oars, and he made a swift charge for the boy, but, while all three men were looking sharply along the surface of the water, a jeering laugh arose behind them.

"Ha! ha! my dandy crooks, don't yer wish ye could spella-b-l-e? You kin splash ther drink all ter foam an' chaos, but yer can't hev me. Go home an' put yerselves on ice. You won't keep in this hot weather."

"Put ther three on ye in a crate, an' ye'd mold like peaches. Comin' ag'in? Sorry, but I can't wait. Got pressin' biz elsewhar. Call 'round some day when trade slacks up, an' I'll ache yer ear off."

The words arose at irregular intervals, and from several different places, for the boatman was pulling lustily toward wherever the voice sounded, but always arriving too late, and just in time to hear the voice from some other quarter.

This angered the boatman, and he swore lustily, while Brown, standing erect in the boat, held his revolver ready for use and vainly tried to sight the dare-devil lad.

Bob, as much at home in the water as a fish, was having his share of the fun at last, and as he heard the dismayed exclamations of the trio, he gained a good deal of satisfaction for his past troubles.

He intended to get more; he knew more about the gang than was healthy for them, and he proposed to work the claim for all it was worth.

When he had had what he considered enough fun at their expense, he headed for the nearest point of land and began swimming swiftly away.

How had he escaped?

This is easily explained.

The drug administered to him was not as powerful as his enemies supposed, and he recovered consciousness while on the journey in the wagon.

Suspecting the state of affairs, he began to work his bonds without betraying the fact that he was conscious, and, after a sharp struggle, succeeded in freeing his hands.

After that the rest was easy, but, just as he got loose, the wharf was reached, and then he had to wait for awhile.

When the party entered the boat he was placed forward near the rock which was destined to carry him down to the bottom of the harbor, and then, to preserve the equilibrium of the boat, Brown and Trott took their places at the stern.

This was, of course, rash, but they had no suspicion that their prisoner was conscious.

After that the darkness aided him, and he secured and opened his pocket-knife and cut the bag.

Next he crawled carefully out and took to the water, and by the time the men were ready to sink him he was well away.

He now swam briskly and soon landed on a dark wharf, from which he made his way to a neighboring street.

Being a stranger in the city he had no idea where he was, but, finding a policeman, learned that it was East Boston.

The officer was curious to know how he had received such a ducking, but the Gamin declined to explain, though he readily accepted the blue-coat's offer to conduct him to a house where he could spend the few remaining hours of the night.

This proved to be the home of a poor and honest family, the members of which were only too anxious to help him. All he wanted, however, was a chance to sleep. He went to bed, and when he awoke the clock was pointing to the numerals VIII.

Gamin Bob soon decided on his course.

"I've got to look up Wrixley, ef he's ter be found, an' ef he ain't, I must paddlo my own canoe, go back ter New York on ther steamer w'ot them crooks mean fur ter blow ter chaos an' kindlin' wood, an' pervent ther racket goin' off. Fu'st, I must hev some dude clothes, so I kin pass myself off ez a blue-blooded nabob o' high degree."

It was not hard to get the garments, for he had thirty dollars concealed in his old clothes, and he went to a store and bought a neat, though plain suit, which made a very different-looking boy of him.

He then set out to find Wrixley, his New York detective friend.

Lacking any clew to Wrixley's stopping-place, he knew of but one way to find him; so he began a circuit of the Boston hotels to see if his name was on a register.

He did not find the name, nor did he find any one who had seen a man resembling Wrixley.

This was a dampener, but the Badger would not give up so easily. He called on the superintendent of police, and asked if he knew Wrixley. Unfortunately, he was not known, and as the Boston official was very busy, his manner was not such as to encourage the Bowery Boy, who had never had good luck with police officials, to relate his story.

"It's clear ez mud that I'm stumped, and I've got ter circumnavigate on my own hook. Ef ther steamboat is saved I'm ther flat-nosed crocodile that'll do it, while ef ther measly old craft is blowed up among ther heavenly spears, B. Bowery, Esquire, will go 'long wi' it, an' mebbe knock a hole plum' outer ther moon. Ef this melancholy affair takes place won't Sadie an' Stumpy shed salt, sad tears? Poor kids, it'll leave 'em orphans!"

Gamin Bob shook his head to express his sympathy for his young friends, and then made his way to the depôt, where he bought a ticket for the port on the south shore where the imperiled steamer received her passengers from the connecting railroad and plowed the Sound on her way to New York.

He arrived with a well-defined purpose, and lost no time in executing it. He remembered that the captain of the boat was named Berkrode, and he at once inquired where he was to be found.

He was found in a saloon, with two other men, three pipes and three glasses of beer.

The New York boy walked coolly up to him and requested an interview, but the mariner glared at him sourly. He was a big man, with a sort of bulldog head, and he showed his nature at once.

"What d'ye want?" he growled.

"I want ter orate ter ye in perivate. Got 'portant biz fur yer own ear, an' nobody else's ear."

"You look like it!"

"Look like w'ot?"

"As though you had important business."

"My benev'lent frien', don't yer bet too high on a chap's looks. Jes' ez like ez not my phyzognomy ain't a classic one, nur calc'lated ter hush howlin' babies—I hope 'tain't that kind, b'gosh! but I kin unfold words o' wisdom that measure twenty quarts ter ther gallon."

Despite the earnestness of the appeal, it was not until he had growled a good deal more that Captain Berkrode would condescend to go to one side.

When he did go, it was in ill-humor.

Bob paid no attention to his growling. He was there to save the steamer, and he intended to do it if such a thing was possible.

In plain, pointed words he told the captain what danger menaced him. Of course all the small items of the case could not be detailed, but he stated plainly that, unless measures were taken to prevent it, the steamer would be blown up that night in mid-sound.

And the captain?

He laughed at the statement, and then smote a table with his fist.

"You poor fool!" he cried, "d'ye suppose you can spin such a yarn and get me to believe it? Not much! You are the nine-hundredth chap who has told me some lie within a year to get a free passage to New York."

"You jest hold yer hosses!" retorted Bob. "Ef you think ther undersigned can't pay his way, jest you rest yer two eyes on these hyar greenbacks. Twelvedollars! Ain't that enough ter git a ride on yer measly old tub 'thout begging it?"

"Put up your money and carry a civil tongue or I'll knock you silly!" roared the captain. "Who said you hadn't any money? Not I! What I did say was that you were trying to beat your way to New York, and I say so now."

A sharp retort trembled on Bob's tongue, but he kept it back.

"Cap'n Berkrode, ef nothin' but yer boat was in danger I'd drop this hyar caucus jest whar 'tis, but thar will be ten-score passengers on ther craft, I s'pose, an' I can't see 'em go ter chaos an' kindlin' wood 'thout openin' my jaw. I've gi'n yer a clean bill o' health, an' I ask yer in ther name o' humanity not ter scoff my warnin' ter scorn."

"Young man, do you see that door?"

"Yes."

"Well, latch it on the outside."

"W'ot am I ter understand by—"

"You're to understand that your fish-stories won't go down. I've seen just such smart chaps as you before, and I know how to deal with you. Blow up a Sound steamer! Stuff and rubbish!—you are the most audacious liar I've seen in my experience on the line. Get out of my sight before I fling you out. I'm character-reader enough to mark you as a New York tough, and you're very likely a sneak-thief. Get out of this, or I'll call an officer and have you arrested. Git!"

CHAPTER XII.

A SURPRISE ALL AROUND.

THE Bowery Boy's face was a picture.

Captain Berkrode's words were not in themselves anything to trouble him; similar words had often been flung at him, and never had he been at a loss for reply.

He was not at a loss now, but his earnest desire to save the steamer and her passengers, if not her cargo, led him to stand before Berkrode with a meekness foreign to him, only his face telling how hard it was to keep back the ready retort he might have flung at the stiff-necked captain.

Curbing his wrath he made still another effort to move the man, but Berkrode rushed at him, and he was under the necessity of beating a hurried retreat.

Escaping, he stood outside with a ludicrous expression on his face.

"Wal, b'gosh! I've seen more measly idjits o' late than ever afore. This hyar ancient mariner is wuss than a mule. He won't hear ter reason when ther werry essence on't is poured gently in his ear. Trouble wi' him is, he's got too much ears! Sorter wants his old tub o' a boat ter go rick'shayin' 'long on Boreas's wings, an' git knocked silly ag'in' ther moon, I reckon. Wal, I don't!"

"Thar will be hooman beings on that thar boat, an' they've got ter be saved. How? It all depends on B. Bowery, Vidocq & Co., an' I never had sech a complicated compleration since I went inter detective biz. W'ot kin I do ter save 'em?"

The Gamin scowled till his forehead looked like a ruffled sea in a stout breeze, but even then he did not see his way clear.

"Hev I got ter go 'long on that steamboat, w'ot is doomed ter be bu'sted? Must I put myself up ez a raffle, ez 'twere, an' be blowed inter chaos an' kalsomime jest ter 'lustrate ther doctrine o' detective fidelity?"

"Not fur Joseph! I ain't goin' ter be torn from my parent limb an' rent shaggy by dynamite, ter 'bleege nobody. Not fur Joseph, b'gosh!"

In making this praiseworthy decision he did not by any means decide to abandon the boat to her fate.

He intended to save her, and he expected to go along with her.

But how?

This was the rub, and he remained in deep thought for several minutes, when his face suddenly brightened.

"That's ther identical way fur ter do it!" he exclaimed.

He walked off toward where the steamer lay at her pier, and in a short time was in conversation with two of the deck-hands who were loitering about.

Their conversation seemed to be of no importance, and Bob did not once hint that danger menaced the boat, but he knew what he was about.

His object was to gain the good will of the men, and by his shrewd, good-humored remarks he soon succeeded perfectly.

They thought him a very odd character, and took pleasure in leading him on to talk, little suspecting that he was laying wires deeper than they.

When he thought he had gained a good hold on them he left, first informing them that he should make the trip to New York with them that night.

"An' I'll do it, too," the Gamin muttered, as he walked away. "Like ez not I'll git blowed up, but 'twould be a great send-off, anyhow, an' I reckon I'll ship; though, fur that matter, I don't mean ter fracture no stars this eve—not fur Joseph. Ef my scheme works, ther measly ole steamer will ride ther billers like a crocodile. We'll see!"

He went and obtained a supper, and then passed the evening until the time when the Boston train was due as best he could.

The train came; a mass of passengers flocked aboard the steamer; and then a fiendish racket followed as the baggage and freight were transferred.

Before this was done Gamin Bob had purchased a ticket for New York, and was safely mixed with the other passengers.

He made no talk with any of them, and, since he had obtained his new clothes, there was nothing about him to make him noticeable among the others.

Nevertheless, he kept out of sight as much as possible, for he did not know what Captain Berkrode might do if he found him aboard.

In due time all preliminaries were arranged and the steamer left the pier.

Bob gazed back at the solid land, which had never looked so safe and pleasant, and wondered what would be the result of his venture.

Would the boat be blown to fragments, taking him along skyward, or would his latest plan save them all?

He waited until the steamer was well away from land, and everybody had settled down for a quiet voyage, and then made his way down to the hold.

This was a place very different from the cabin, and other parts of the craft devoted to the passengers. Boxes, bales and barrels were huddled at the sides; the stamp of horses sounded occasionally; and the few people visible were coarsely dressed.

Among them the New York lad saw one of the men with whom he had made friends on the pier, and as he was cordially greeted, he did not miss the chance to talk.

"Got a pile o' freight, ain't ye?" he asked.

"Yes; the biggest lot we've had at any one time since I have been in the business."

"S'pose ther New York business houses hez a good 'eal sent over yer line?"

"Piles of it."

"Who patronizes yer ther most?"

"Oh, I don't know; though Walkington & Goff take the cake on this cargo."

Bob started.

"Who?"

"Walkington & Goff."

"O' Leonard street?"

"Yes."

"You don't say so!"

"But I do. Why? Do you know them?"

"I've heerd tell on 'em; 'specially o' Christopher Goff. Yes, rather! So they've got a pile o' stuff aboard?"

"Over half of all the cargo; all those fresh-looking cases over there are theirs."

"Who stands next?"

"I don't know. Nobody else has any great amount on board this trip. Walkington & Goff seem to have taken a mighty spurt in business."

"Um!"

Bob thrust his hands into his pockets, shut one eye and looked meditatively into the darkness. He had decided that by asking these questions he could learn the name of the scheming firm who proposed to blow the steamer to eternity for a few thousand blood-stained dollars.

He had asked the question, and the answer had been—Walkington & Goff.

"Sorter takes me by s'prise, though it are jes' ther kind o' a high-toned cut-throat I took Chris

ter be. Money don't make folks honest—not fur Joseph. Wal, now, ef I kin save this vessel from gettin' blowed up, mebbe I won't hev a grip on Chris! He'll acknowledge Sadie Bird, or git ther wu'st case o' knockin'-out heerd on this era. Bet yer slippers."

After a few minutes the young detective began wandering idly around among the freight.

Somewhere there was the dynamite-charged can which was expected to blow them all to eternity. As it was not at all likely any of the gang had come along on so deadly a journey, it seemed probable that if he could get his hands on the can and throw it overboard the steamer would be saved.

He had noted the appearance of the box too well to be long at fault, and he found it perched on top of some softer substances as seemed fit for an article marked as glass, as this was.

"Hyar you be, you gallus critter! Look in-nercent enough, don't yer? 'Glass,' hey? Wal, I should smile! Ef yer ain't ther most 'bustible glass I ever see'd, I'm a dirt-coated Sioux chief wi' a forked tongue."

Had circumstances been favorable, the young boy detective would have promptly disposed of the thing as he had planned; but other eyes were on him, and he saw that he must wait.

If the clock in the box was set for the hour of four he still had plenty of time if nothing went wrong.

"That's jest ther rub," muttered Bob, with a shiver. "Ther darned ole clock may be no good, an' git ahead o' ther schedule, in which case we're liable ter go sailin' through ther ether any minute. We're stannin' on ther brink o' a volcaner, as 'twere, an' ther werry air is full o' ghosts an' goblins, mebbe, waitin' ter scoop us in. Wonder ef ther deck-hands would b'lieve me any more than that crabbed ole cap'n did, ef I was ter sing my ditty in their ears?"

He considered this point for some time, and finally decided to sound them cautiously.

"I'll see how many feet ter ther yard they be afore I divulge fully, though."

He turned away, and was proceeding toward the men, when looking ahead, he chanced to observe some one at sight of whom he came to a full stop.

His face expressed surprise, and well it might. Unless he was greatly mistaken the man was Jason Stonerod, the detective he had seen in Wrixley's office when he first called to secure the latter's aid.

Whether he was right he could not say positively, for the man no sooner saw him than he dodged out of sight behind a corner.

A look of suspicion crossed Bob's face. As will be remembered he did not have any too good an opinion of Mr. Stonerod, and as he remembered the latter's anxiety to know about the object of his visit to Wrixley, it struck him as peculiar that Stonerod should be there and so anxious to avoid notice.

"B'gosh, I'll know whether 'tis him, anyhow!" muttered the Gamin; and he was hurrying away when he came face to face with some one so unmistakably familiar of face and form that he again paused.

His fresh encounter was with David Ballard.

They looked at each other in mutual surprise for a moment.

It was the Badger who found his tongue first.

"Hello, be you here?"

"I certainly am," Ballard good-humoredly replied, "but I am not so sure about you. I never thought to see the Badger on a Sound steamer, and in such good shape."

"Clothes don't count, fur they is only ther garments o' a day, but w'ot in ther world be you doin' here?"

"Taking a ride."

"Don't evade ther interrogatory, Davy! Why ain't yer in Walkington & Goff's office? Be yer bounced?"

"No."

"Then w'ot be yer doin' hyar?"

"I'm on new work for awhile."

"What work?" the boy persisted.

"Simply guarding goods across the Sound. You see, Walkington & Goff send valuable articles over this line—silks, laces, and so on—and I go along to see that the goods travel safely."

Bob's eyes had expanded to a large size.

"You do, hey? Sence when?"

"This is my first trip."

"How did yer happen ter begin?"

Ballard looked annoyed.

"Aren't you a little too inquisitive, Bob?" he asked.

"Not by a blamed sight—not fur Joseph!" the New York boy replied. "Thar's a gallus scheme

afoot, an' I smell a hundred-pound mice. Say, was thar anything queer 'bout ther way W. & G. put yer on ther job?"

"Why do you ask?" seriously questioned David.

"'Cause ef thar was, it may be a matter o' life an' death ter yer ter hear w'ot I've got ter say. I'm onter ther measliest conspiracion ye ever heern on, an' I want yer ter say rightout plump if your bosses have any grudge ag'in' yer, or would nat'rally want yer blowed ter chaos an'—"

Gamin Bob was interrupted. A heavy hand fell on his shoulder, and a harsh voice sounded in his ear:

"Boy, you are my prisoner! Your little game is up, and I arrest you in the name of the law!"

CHAPTER XIII.

COUNTING THE SECONDS.

GAMIN BOB had no need to be told who spoke. He recognized the voice at once, and, turning, looked coolly at Captain Berkrode. The officer's face was angry, and he gave the boy a shake.

"You wretched little scoundrel!" he cried; "I have a good mind to throw you overboard."

"You'd better sp'ile a good mind this time, ef yer want ter eat hash in New York ter-morrer, or any time afore Gabriel's drill-day," retorted the unabashed lad.

"None of your back-talk!"

"Mebbe you run my tongue, an' mebbe not. But, ter come right down ter ther cast-iron, copper-toed faxsof ther case—did I hear yer openin' ad'ress co'rect?"

"I said you were my prisoner."

"Jes' so. Wal, wher'fore an' why?"

"Because you're a thief!"

"I be? W'ot hev I perloined?"

"Nothing aboard this craft, for the good reason that you have not had time. Thanks to information I have received, you will have no chance."

"Information from who?"

"A gentleman passenger."

"By ther name o'—what?"

"He gave no name, and will not to you, but he knows what you are in New York—a thief—and I shall hand you over to the New York police."

"Captain," interrupted David Ballard, earnestly, "I feel sure you are mistaken. I have known this boy for two years, and have reason to believe that he is an honest, industrious and trustworthy lad."

"Sir," said Berkrode, stiffly, as he touched his cap, "my information is unimpeachable, and I am not in need of more witnesses."

"But, captain—"

"Excuse me, sir," still more harshly, "but those who speak for this young scamp only lay themselves liable to suspicion. My information is perfectly reliable."

"It's a mistake," asserted Bob. "Besides Dave, here, there ain't another galoot on ther steamer that knows me—"

He paused suddenly.

He had remembered the man whom he had thought was Jason Stonerod!

Then, like a flash, came other recollections.

Stonerod had been anxious that Bob should confide in him, and the boy had left a letter in Wrixley's office which, though it told nothing plainly, was enough to have set the other detective on the track if he had been dishonest enough to open the letter and use the hints therein conveyed.

The street scout's old distrust of the man returned with redoubled force, and he felt almost sure that Stonerod was himself aboard the boat and trying to work up the case; and that it was to remove a rival that he had made a trumped-up charge against the boy.

"Say," cried the latter, "jest give me one squint at that chap, will yer? I want ter see him powerful bad, and it'll settle a p'int—"

"You can't see him."

"Wal, is his name Stonerod?"

"I tell you that you shall know nothing. Enough that you are nipped in the bud, and your power to 'work' this boat gone. I'll put you through for it, too."

He started to drag the boy away, but Bob held back stoutly.

"Wait, will yer? D'ye remember w'ot I said ter you in ther saloon this arternoon?"

"Yes, I do; and I knew you had some scheme afoot then. You wanted the run of the boat, did you, you scoundrel?"

"No, I didn't; but I wanted ter save you an' ther boat from bein' blowed ter chaos an' kind-

lin'-wood by measly dynamite. Thar's a box hyar which—"

"Oh, come! Enough of this nonsense. I have you foul, and all your arts can't save you. The New York police will take care of you."

"No, they won't; not fur Joseph! Thar won't be ernough o' me ter feed a lame cat on ef that dynamite ain't headed off. Say, can't yer hol' on till I tell my story? I don't want you 'n' me ter be blowed up, fur you ain't fit ter die, an' I'd be an awful loss ter ther world. Say, gimme three gentlemen ter hear my story, an' then ef you don't b'lieve—"

Half of this speech had been made as Bob was being dragged away, and all his efforts to say anything more were unavailing. Berkrode held fast, and his superior strength rendered the Bowery Boy's efforts unavailing.

Once David Ballard started forward with the intention of interfering, but other employees gathered around Bob, and he saw that any interference would be useless then.

As the previous conversation had taken place where it did, it had attracted the attention of few besides the employees of the steamer, and Berkrode succeeded in conducting his prisoner to his new quarters without the passengers suspecting the state of affairs.

He had previously arranged to put him in one of the "outside" state-rooms which, owing to a recent accident, was not in condition for occupancy by a passenger.

To this place Bob was led, with Berkrode and two other hands for a guard.

The captain lit the lamp which hung in a bracket, and then turned to the boy. The latter was keeping very quiet, for he thought the best way to impress the officer was to wait until he could speak with few witnesses.

"This will be your place for to-night," explained Berkrode. "We shall bind you and place you on the lower berth. You'll get the free passage you crave, but, when you get to New York, possibly they won't give you quite so good a show in the Tombs."

"Cap'n," seriously replied Bob, "we won't never git ter New York, ef you persist in—"

"Silence! Bind and gag him, men!"

"Hol' on, Cap! All I ask is that you'll jest 'zamine a sart'in box which I'll show ye—"

"Gag him!"

"Hol' on! You'll be blowed ter chaos. Thar's dynamite aboard, an' it's ter be 'sploded, an' you—"

So far Bob managed to speak disconnectedly, but the angry stamp of Berkrode's foot left the other men no choice, and a bandage across his mouth shut off further speech.

In a short time he was perfectly helpless, both hands and feet being tied.

The stubborn nature of the captain bade fair to lead to a great disaster; in his unreasoning spite against Gamin Bob he was foolish enough to disregard all that he said.

"Now toss him into the lower berth," Berkrode ordered.

It was done as he said, and another cord held the prisoner down so that he could by no possibility escape—unless the captain was greatly mistaken.

"You can lie here and chew your cud," he elegantly added, "and think how you'll be welcomed back to New York. You'll get six months at Blackwell's, at the very least, and I'll do my best to have you sent to Sing Sing. Think of that! Come, boys, it's two o'clock, and there is work for us all."

They left the state-room, and Berkrode locked the door behind him.

"Wal, b'gosh, hyar I be, in ther wu'st gallus scrape I ever did git inter," thought the Badger. "Two o'clock, is it? Jes' so! Wal, in about two hours—at four—ter wit, namely—we'll all go cruisin' up 'mongst ther heavenly spears, knockin' chips off'm Jupiter, Wenus, Mars an' Satan. Seems kinder a melancholy eend ter my detective career. Hyar be I, right in ther blush o' youth, an' ther hull world afore me, got ter be chawed into hash by ther measly dynamite. Two hours afore we bu'st! Jes' so; but I don't see how I kin git ready fur ther cruise in that time. I ain't partial ter that airline, nohow—not fur Joseph!"

He gave a vicious twist at his bonds, but they held fast.

"Shoot that bull-headed ole navigator, he ain't got ther brain o' a 'skeeter in his cranium. Don't s'pect I kin tell ther truth, hey? Wal, mebbe when we all git ter ther moon he'll come round an' apologize."

This possibility did not afford any great satisfaction, and Gamin Bob turned to the more practical points of the case.

"I've found out clear ez grease who 'tis w'at

wants ter blow up ther steamer, an' their names is Walkington & Goff, ter wit, namely. Now, why did they put Dave Ballard inter ther game? 'Tis his fu'st trip, an' it's clear they want him blowed inter nothin'. Mebbe they've arranged ter throw ther blame on him."

Gamin Bob was rapidly unraveling the web of the plot, but was not in a situation to profit by it.

"Then there's Jason Stonerod. I know 'twas him I seen, an' I'll bet a high hat 'twas him w'ot told ther ancient mar'ner that I was a thief. I all'ays thought he was a gallus chap, an' now I know it. Strikes me he is onter a part o' this racket, an' wants all ther glory, but I don't believe he knows thar is dynamite aboard. Result, this hyar boat is bound ter be bu'sted, an' 'bout two hundred hooman bein's torn ragged, ef I don't git outer hock."

The boy began to struggle with his bonds again, but without perceptible effect.

Time was passing rapidly on, and all the while the clock in the box of dynamite was nearing the point where it would explode the villainous contents of the box. When that moment arrived the steamer and all the people aboard would be blown to pieces.

The prisoner wrestled furiously with his bonds.

If he had had the use of his tongue he would have shouted lustily, but even that hope was cut off, and minute after minute passed.

Half-past two arrived.

Then a quarter of an hour more.

Then three o'clock!

One hour more, and the fatal explosion would occur.

Gamin Bob shivered. He was a brave young fellow, but there was something so terrible about the fate in store for him and the unsuspecting passengers that it made him feel cold and dismayed.

One short hour more!

"I've got ter git out o' this—I must! I don't set old Berkrode's life above par, b'gosh; but ther passengers' lives is vall'able, an' so's mine. I ain't ready ter be torn ragged—not fur Joseph! W'ot kin I do?"

It occurred to him that if he had the use of his sharp, strong teeth, he could gnaw his bonds away, and the idea of displacing the bandage over his mouth by friction against the wall, or pillow, caused him to begin at once.

It was not easy work, and his head seemed to get more friction than the bandage, but he kept on until a small fire seemed blazing in his chafed flesh and the cuticle about gone.

And all the while the minutes were speeding away; the fatal moment was rapidly approaching when the steamer would be blown to pieces.

"B'gosh, I can't see that ther measly bandage moves a tall. Reckon I'm beat, an' we've all got ter go to chaos an' kindlin'-wood."

On plowed the steamer. She was a gallant craft, and the waters of the Sound were like an old friend. She glided over and through, with the white foam whirling away from her cut-water, and it seemed that there was pride in every motion; but the rattle of her machinery was like the taunting laugh of a fiend to Bowery Bob.

In a little while the natural tremor of the boat would be increased a thousand fold, and the proud craft would be a shapeless mass of metal and wood.

There was no hope that the dynamiter's clock would stop.

The explosion would soon occur.

Suddenly the blood bounded more warmly through the prisoner's veins. With one sudden motion the bandage had given way, and his mouth was at last free.

The chance to raise his voice and alarm all who were aboard the boat was then his, but he did not shout. Instead, he preferred to try to gnaw away his bonds, and he had just attacked the cords when a footstep was followed by the rattling of the cabin door. Bob's heart sunk.

"It's that measly ole cap'n comin' back, an' he'll knock all my hopes inter red ruin!" he thought, disconsolately.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GAMIN USES HIS TEETH—AND SOMETHING MORE.

THE rattling was followed by a pause, another trial of the door, and then the steps were heard in retreat.

Gamin Bob hesitated for a moment, and then, as the possibility occurred to him that the unseen was some one not the captain, or one of his tools, he raised his voice and called.

There was no answer; if the unknown heard, he did not heed.

"B'gosh, that chance is gone, an' I've got ter rely on myself. It must be mighty near half-past three, an' ef I don't git these measly cords gnawed off, this craft is a gone goose!"

He bent his head and attacked the cords with his teeth. Good teeth they were as he well knew, and he had often astonished his boy associates by his feats in that line.

This time he was gnawing for his life, and he went at the job with zeal. Tearing at the cords as a dog does at a bone, his heart felt lighter as he felt strand after strand part. Not for a moment did he pause, however. The minutes were still slipping away, and the fatal hour grew nearer.

"Hip, hurrah, an' a tiger!"

He half-shouted the words as the last strand parted.

His hands were free.

It only remained to liberate his ankles.

This was quickly done, for he brought out his pocket-knife, but just as he severed the cords the state-room door was again rattled. He determined to take the risk of speaking.

"I say, who's thar?"

Instantly there came a reply.

"Is that you, Bob?"

"B'gosh, I reckon it be. Who are you? Is it Dave Ballard?"

"Yes, it is I. What can I do for you?"

"Get me out o' here quicker'n you kin say 'Jack.' Ef yer don't, this hyar craft will go sailin' ter everlastin' smash."

"The door is locked."

"Go ter ther winder then. Between us I reckon we kin open it, an' then I'll crawl out."

Gamin Bob was fumbling at the window as he spoke, and he was pleased to find that it was not fastened more than usual. He succeeded in pushing back the slat-work, and the fresh air of the Sound rushed in briskly.

He caught at the solid wood and drew his lithe form through quickly. By that time Ballard was beside the window.

"Tell me what is wrong," the latter said, eagerly.

"I'm afeard thar's no time fur 'splanations. W'ot time is it now?"

Even as he spoke a clock in some distant state-room sent four strokes dimly to their ears.

"Great Scott! it's too late—we're goin' up. It's four o'clock!"

"No," answered Ballard; "that clock must be fast."

He had drawn his watch, and enough light for his purpose fell on the dial from a neighboring lamp.

"Half-past three," he announced.

Gamin Bob drew a deep breath.

"Then thar is half an hour o' grace ahead o' us, but we've got ter hustle ter save our bacon."

"Why? What is wrong? Tell me quickly!"

"Jes' this. Them cases o' Walkington & Goff's which purport ter contain silks an' sech is filled wi' nothin' but rubbish, an' they mean ter defraud ther insurance companies an' ther boat-line an' sich, by blowin' ther hull steamer up, an' gittin' paid fur w'ot ain't aboard."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Ballard, "I see the scoundrel's scheme now."

"Whose?"

"Walkington's."

"Jes' so! Wal, I don't propose ter be blowed up—not fur Joseph! We must pitch that air can o' dynamite overboard. No, we need it ez evidence ag'in' ther gallus schemers, an' we must keep it somehow. Say, can't we kill ther thing by puttin' it a-soak?"

"I think so."

"Then we'll anchor it astarn wi' a long rope, an' tow it in."

"A capital plan; but how are we to distinguish the box?"

"Easy enough; I know it already. Ther only trouble is ther opposition o' that measly cap'n, an' ther dynamite clock is set ter go off at four o'clock. Thar hain't no time ter lose."

"You're right, Robert; but I believe we can work it. Nearly every one is now asleep, and if the deck-hands are sensible, we may yet be saved."

"Let's scoot, then!"

They did "scoot" in earnest, and made their way to the cabin, and then to the hold, and in quick time. Captain Berkrode was not seen on the way, and no one molested them; but Gamin Bob was at once recognized by the men on duty, and their faces showed they bore him no ill-will, whatever Berkrode might think.

It then lacked but twenty-two minutes of four, and Gamin Bob fairly beat the record for time as he poured out a few sharp sentences of explanation, but, fast as he talked, he made all

clear, and the faces of the men showed the horror they felt.

Never before in their experience had they heard of such a cold-blooded, villainous scheme.

All caught eagerly at Gamin Bob's idea of towing the infernal machine astern, and it was taken out quickly, but with wonderful care even for a box marked "glass."

As it seemed to be water-tight, one of the men ran the risk of cutting a gash across the top, through which the water would readily enter, and then it was conveyed to the stern and dropped over with two hundred feet of rope attached.

With the cut in the top, the water would soon spoil whatever combustible might be inside.

When the work was done, Ballard's watch indicated twelve minutes to four! They had escaped destruction by a hair's breadth, as it were.

They stood in a group and looked back until four o'clock had passed, but there was no explosion, and all felt satisfied that the danger was past.

Up to this time there had been no sign of Captain Berkrode, but, just as they were mutually congratulating themselves, a harsh voice broke in on their conversation.

"What are you all doing here? Get back to your places, or I'll—Hello!"

He stopped short and stared blankly as he recognized Bob.

"You here?" he exclaimed. "Who the fiend has dared to liberate this boy?"

"Ther boy hisself were ther hoss-chestnut that did it," coolly replied the Bowery lad. "Did ye suppose yer ole ropes would hold me? Not any, fer Joseph!"

"Get back to your prison, you scoundrel, or—"

"Wait, Captain Berkrode!"

It was David Ballard's voice, and he spoke firmly as he stepped in front of the irate captain.

"So it's you again! What the deuce do you want?"

"Justice for this lad. He has saved us all from destruction, and, if you molest him further, I shall make complaint against you at the company's office when we arrive at New York."

"You will, eh? We'll see! Men, take both these fellows and lock them in the tightest place in the steamer. Ay, bind them fast to the stanchions in the hold. We'll see how they like that sort of experience. Away with them!"

"Not any, fer Joseph!" stoutly replied Gamin Bob. "Ef yer lay a hand on me, I'll yell like bloody murder an' wake up ther hull caboodle o' ther passengers. We'll see ef a free, enlightened citizen o' ther city o' New York, U. S. A., is goin' ter be drawn an' quartered. Wal, he ain't, not ef his name is 'The Bowery Badger.'"

"What's that? What's going on here?"

The inquiry came in a voice new to the quarrel, and a tall, finely-formed man strode forward and joined the group. Bob no sooner saw him distinctly than he uttered an exclamation of joy.

"E Pluribus, pluribuster! Wrix, is it you? Whar in ther known world did you drop from? Great Scott! ef I'd knowed you was hyar, w'ot a pile o' trouble I'd dodged!"

His face beamed, and well it might. The new-comer was Wrixley, his detective friend, and he felt sure of justice at last.

"What trouble have you been in? Captain Berkrode, why were you threatening this boy?"

The officer's face was red, and when he tried to explain he merely stammered incoherently. He had good reasons for being afraid of the keen-eyed detective, who knew certain things about him not known to every one.

He tried to excuse himself, but Wrixley interrupted.

"You had better invite both me and Bob into your cabin; I want to know the full cause of all this loud talk. Allow me to say, however, that though sickness has kept me in my cabin ever since the boat left her pier, and I am still far from well, I have confidence enough in this lad to assert that he is right and you are wrong!"

"Three cheers fur you, Wrix!" returned Gamin Bob. "I'd rather see you now than ther queen o' South Ameriky, b'gosh, an' whoever is ter blame in this row, yer kin make up yer mind 'tain't B. Bowery, E-squire—not fur Joseph!"

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH "A MEASLY SCHEME GETS BU'STED."

WHEN the steamer touched her pier in New York, the following forenoon, the greater part of the passengers went ashore as quietly as though the trip had been uneventful, and, in-

deed, they knew nothing to the contrary; but some of their number stayed, and, at the end of half an hour, a messenger, who had been sent away, returned, accompanied by several sharp-looking men who had an official look.

They might well have that appearance, for one of them was the superintendent of police.

Down in the cabin they were shown a box, harmless enough then, which was found to contain an apparatus like a clock, and enough dynamite to have demolished the steamer had not the box been treated to a bath, as before related.

The hero of the occasion was the Bowery Gamin, who could not be too highly praised to suit the officers, but two men present had much the look of whipped curs.

They were Captain Berkrode, who had been obliged to own himself a stubborn fool, and Jason Stonerod.

The latter had been frightened by Wrixley into confessing that he had opened the letter left for his brother detective by Gamin Bob, and, though he had gained but a dim idea of what was the trouble, he had learned enough so that he took passage on the boat that night, hoping to make a great discovery.

As he had no clew to the dynamite part, he narrowly escaped death as a reward for his treachery.

It was he who told Berkrode that Bob was a thief. Seeing the boy there he took that way to get rid of him, and, in the mean while, prowled all over the boat, hoping to discover some crookedness. He found nothing, however, and now felt himself the smallest man, mentally and physically, in New York.

After spending half an hour on the steamer, a number of the officers started, under the street scout's guidance, for the dynamiters' den up-town.

They found the place looking as usual, and Bob led the way up-stairs, but they did not wait to knock. A quick turn of an instrument in a practiced hand threw back the lock bolt, and they strode into the attic.

The first person Gamin Bob saw was Dupré, the Frenchman.

He had arisen from a chair, and was staring at them with eyes so enlarged by terror that they seemed thrice their natural size.

But this was not all. Just back of Dupré were two other men. One was Pat Merrigan; but for him the young detective cared nothing. He saw a bigger rascal.

It was Mr. Christopher Goff!

This gentleman had turned very pale, and, like Dupré, he looked in silent dismay as Gamin Bob walked forward.

"Hallo, gents!" saluted the lad, coolly. "Hope I see yer well, Do-pray; an' likewise you, Chris. How's dynamite an' things?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" broke forth the Frenchman, "I know not v'at you mean, at all. I know not ze dynamite, an' I am von innocent man."

"You're ez innercent ez a crocodile. Wrixley, this is ther chief dynamiter, an' one o' ther measly chaps w'ot boxed me up; an' this is ole Chris Goff, ter wit, namely—ther chap who tried ter blow up ther steamer."

"It is false!" asserted Goff, but his usually imposing voice was husky. "What lie is this? Be careful, boy, for I will have the law of you!"

"You're welcome ter ship me a few samples when the law gits through wi' you; but I opine thar won't be no love in yer breast fur law by that time."

"You bet thar won't!"

The words came in a small voice from the darker part of the loft, and a ragged girl advanced. Gamin Bob looked at her in amazement.

"Sariah Bird, you hyar!"

"You kin safely say that I be, Jes' so! An' I hereby enter a true bill ag'in' my nefarious uncle, C. Goff, fur abductin' me, an' stealin' an' destroyin' ther written 'fession o' Marm Bird ter important fax."

At this point Merrigan bounded forward.

"No!" he exclaimed, "ther paper *ain't* destroyed. I will turn State's evidence. I helped Goff ter steal it, but I played a double game on him, an' ther paper we got from ther bed-post I kept. I handed over ter him another, which warn't no good, an' the genuine one I have now. I'll give it to you. I also accuse Goff an' his partner, Walkington, o' schemin' ter blow up a Sound steamer. I helped them in it. My name is Pat Merrigan, *alias* Hank Cowles, an' I'll swear to all I say."

He poured forth this explanation with all the rapidity of a frightened man, unheeding Christopher Goff's angry glances.

"Good fur you, mister!" added Sadie. "I'll forgive ye fur abductin' me ef you'll perdooce that dockyment."

"It's all a lie—" began Goff, but Wrixley interrupted him.

"You may defend yourself in court, not here. You are all under arrest, and may as well go quietly."

"Jes' so," put in Bob. "You've run ter ther eend o' yer rope on yer gallus scheme, an' come up wi' a jerk. Them ez plays wi' fire is sure fur ter burn their fingers, an' I don't s'pose ther will be many salt, sad tears shed over you, Chris—not fur Joseph! Sariah, I'd ez soon thought o' seein' you in Queen Vic's palace, but thar's no knowin' w'ot will occur when crooks an' sinners git ter playin' their measly games. Ef one game ain't about bu'sted, then ther firm o' B. Bowery, Vidocq & Co. is pooty bad left. Wrix, scoop 'em in; they're dis'greeable ter handle, but ther good o' perlite s'ciety demands that they rusticate fur a period at Sing Sing!"

With the case worked to such a point, it did not take long to finish it. Besides Goff, Dupré and Merrigan, the police arrested Walkington and Jung, as well as Brown and Trott, at Boston.

The confessions of the minor villains fixed the crime of trying to destroy the steamer on Walkington & Goff. They also developed the fact that David Ballard was first charged with theft so that he could be used as a cat's-paw. The conspirators intended to have it seem that, after they had kindly taken him back, David blew up the boat as a desperate means of revenge.

The boxes belonging to the firm, said to contain rich goods, really held nothing of value.

Sadie had been abducted by Jung and Merrigan the morning they detected her listening to them in the street, and was kept prisoner in the garret until found by Bob and his companions, but Merrigan's account of the missing paper was correct.

Goff had gained a clew to its hiding-place by bribing Mrs. Callahan, after the latter played the spy, and he and Merrigan stole it, but the man played a trick on his master and it was saved.

It proved to be important; not because it was good in law, executed as it was, but because it gave facts which led to Sadie being proved the daughter of James Goff.

She recovered her rights, and has been placed in a good school.

Goff, Walkington, Jung, Dupré, Brown and Trott were duly punished by law, while Merrigan, who was not Irish, but whose real name was Hank Cowles, was released because of his testimony, on condition that he left New York, never to return.

Mrs. Callahan also obeyed a quiet hint and vanished.

Captain Berkrode lost his position on the steamer line because of his course when he would not hear to a fair warning.

Stonerod, the detective, seemed to think New York unhealthy for him, and is now in Montreal.

David Ballard has a new situation, obtained for him by Wrixley. His name is cleared of stain, and he is prosperous, as he well deserves to be.

One day Wrixley summoned Gamin Bob to his office, and handed over a generous sum of money sent through him to the brave boy by the managers of the Sound line of steamers.

"What shall you do with it?" Wrixley asked.

"Plant it in a bank an' let it 'cumulate. 'Twon't be ther fu'st I hev thar, an' bimeby, ef I keep ther weeds out, I'll hev bullion enough ter be rich ez Billy Vanderbilt on his daddy's money."

"I suppose you retire from detective work?"

"Not fur Joseph! No, sirree! Detective work sorter suits me, an' ef I kin eat enough ter git a few hundred pounds adadupus onter my bones, I'll be a solid man on ther force yit. When detectives ain't needed, thar won't be no crooks, an' thar *will* be crooks while folkses hev sech measly lax idees 'bout ther square-root an' addition o' public an' perivate a'fairs. Gamin Robert will put on his familiar ole rags ter-morrer, Wrix, an' go out fer ter see w'ot gallus crook he kin devour. Stumpy sez I'll come ter grief, but B. Bowery, Vidocq & Co. will make ther dry bones rattle out 'Hail Columby' in several keys, afore they git stuck scalp-deep in ther mud. 'Tain't nat'ral ter Gamin Robert to git left—not fur Joseph!"

THE END.

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